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C. B. Myerson

THE

MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

“THE HEIRESS,” “AGNES SERLE,” &c.

Je n'ai pas de la prétension, vous le savez ; je laisse errer ma plume.

PUCKLER MUSKAU.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
MERCHANT'S DAUGHTER.

CHAPTER I.

“ Wild tales and rumours went abroad ;
And each look'd strangely in his neighbour's face,
And searchingly. Foe smiled on foe ; and friends
Spoke in low whispers—brief meaning words,
Or quickly pass'd upon the other side
With downcast look. Suspicion's plague-spots
Spread on all around.”

“ Is yellow dirt the passion of thy life ? ”

POPE.

OWING to the pertinacious pressing of more than one domestic to partake of breakfast,—a breakfast prepared by the express orders of Miss Lyle, they said,—Gordon found it impossible to quit the house as early as he had

intended ; and then, on passing through the hall, he had to hear and answer the good b'yes and good wishes of old nurse and others. It was a trial he would gladly have been spared ; but standing alone as he did in the world, he felt the value of their good will, and controlling himself not to pain them, he received and returned their friendly wishes with a courtesy and sincerity which increased his popularity.

He passed on even through the outer gate without turning to take one last, long look ; but no sooner had that closed behind him, than, guiding his horse from the direct road, he gained a rising ground at a little distance which overlooked the park of Atherton and one side of the noble mansion. The reins dropped on his horse's neck, who cropped the short sweet grass at his pleasure ; and the fresh morning breeze waved the glossy curls on his lofty brow, cooling its burning heat and stilling the throbbing of his temples. Poor Wal-

ter ! he had not slept that night, and he was looking, perhaps for the last time, on those woods where he had wandered, if not exactly in boyhood, yet in the undoubting happiness of youth,—on the roof beneath whose shelter dwelt her who had taught him how to love—whom he must never see again. So completely was he absorbed in his own melancholy thoughts, contrasting the present with the past, that the battle of Waterloo might have been acting near him and he not have heard its deafening thunders, or guessed its terrors, unless roused by the stroke of a cannon-ball or the cut of a sabre. No wonder, then, that he still believed himself alone—still gazed on the park and the mansion, and in a moment of excitement waved his hand in that direction, as if wafting to it his last adieu.

“ Poor youth ! What ! is the lady faithless? or does she still slumber, forgetful of her pledge ?”

Gordon turned round at the sarcastic tones,

which seemed poured into his ear with a scathing power, so close was their utterer, and encountered the wrathful looks of the fiery Dunrayne.

Bewildered at this sudden and harsh disturbing of his train of thought, and not exactly comprehending the words, Gordon looked at the speaker in silent surprise.

“Never look at me, Mr. Gordon, whilst you can look on the window of your lady fair. See! it opens, and she waves a fond farewell to her departing lover.”

By an involuntary impulse Gordon looked as desired, and true enough there was the open window, and something white waving in the distance. He gazed intently for some moments, then retook the reins, and drawing himself up, sat proudly on his horse, fronting the furious Dunrayne, whose eye had never left him for a moment, and whose rage was increased by the indifference with which his sarcasms had been received.

“Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Gordon, on your good fortune, and the philosophy with which you bear it,” said Dunrayne, bending even to his horse’s mane in insolent mockery. “But you are doubtless used to such honour from the ladies. It is not every one who could or would win a daughter’s favour against her father’s will;—it is not every one to whom Miss Lyle would wave her handkerchief, for the world deems her cold, reserved, the very incarnation of propriety. It is only that she is particular in the bestowing of her regard, and that, maiden-like, despising wealth and rank, she would choose a poor and nameless mate that he may the more highly prize her love. And who shall doubt the wisdom of her choice? My compliments to the fair Florence, and say, I shall be present at her wedding.”

We have said that Gordon’s passions were naturally violent when fully roused; and they had been rousing for the last few days. There

had been no sleep the night before to allay the fever raging in his veins ; nothing could be more insulting—intentionally insulting, than Dunrayne's address,—insulting too to her he loved,—and Gordon with difficulty restrained himself from felling his insulter to the earth. His hand was raised ; but he checked the act, and only spoke—spoke, we must allow, with a wrath little less fierce than Dunrayne's, though far more justifiable.

“ Who are you that dare to couple dishonour with my name ? And worse—far worse, how dare you hint a stain on the fair fame of Florence Lyle ? Are your eyes so blinded that you cannot tell a serving-girl with her duster, from a delicate and gentle maiden ? Is your heart so depraved that you would accuse and suspect even purity itself ? ”

“ Who am I to venture on such acts ? Oh, I am Thomas Dunrayne, commonly called Viscount Dunrayne, only son of Henry Dunrayne, Earl of Aggenthorpe : though I believe you knew all

this before. For the how I dare to speak the truth to those who do not like it, enough to say, that I never yet drew back at the words of passion or the looks of wrath. And now, sir, who are you who pretend to doubt the truth of my statement, throwing back the accusations which you cannot refute? But methinks I know the person I am addressing better than he may desire."

" You do not know the person you are addressing, Lord Dunrayne, or you would not have used the words you have. You are unworthy of Miss Lyle's regard, since, though but in passion, you charge her with impropriety. That charge must be retracted."

" Must it?" said Dunrayne with an insulting sneer. " And pray, sir, by what right do you claim its retraction? in what character?"

" By the right and in the character of a man of honour who will not hear the pure defamed and not defend them;—by the right and in the character of a true and disinterested

friend of Miss Lyle and her father—one bound to both by gratitude."

"By no other right, and in no other character, Mr. Gordon?" questioned Dunrayne, whose flashing eyes were freely fixed on his changing features.

The blood that had before flushed Gordon's cheek spread to his temples, and then retreated to his heart—an observer might have thought, never to return, so deathlike did it leave his cheeks and brow.

"Yes, Lord Dunrayne, by one other right and in one other character. By the right of love—hopeless love! I leave Atherton to return no more—I have seen Florence Lyle for the last time on this side of the grave! It was not her you saw at the window;—she mourns not my absence—she holds me not in remembrance. You have my secret—you can blazon it to the world if it so please you;—I ask no favour for myself; but if you have the noble and generous feelings which she asserts you

have,—if you possess but one spark of honour,—you will retract fully, freely, your charge on her—your charge on me."

"I will—I do!" exclaimed Dunrayne, subdued by his noble bearing, and feeling the magnitude of the sacrifice:—impetuous alike in good or ill, extending his hand as he spoke, but looking down in conscious shame.

"Enough! I am satisfied, my lord:" said Gordon with a stately bow, taking no notice of the extended hand, and drawing up the reins to depart.

"No, Mr. Gordon, it is not enough: we must not part as enemies. I have wronged you now—I have wronged you before. I believed you a successful rival—I have rarely met you without the wish to wound. To your honour I acknowledge, that you have often spared me when you might have crushed—defended when I had no right to expect defence. I make no excuse for my late conduct,—it is inexcusable—jealousy is no sufficient plea; but you shall not leave me with no

answer but that stately bow. Say you will forget my words, or I shall not be at peace: your look of suffering will rise before me as an accusing spirit. It was a less crime to have slandered her, than to have wrung that noble heart. Walter Gordon, can you forgive this?"

" Readily! willingly! I too have done you wrong: I did not believe you capable of this generous reparation of an injury."

The hands of the young men met with a warm and friendly pressure. A short silence succeeded, each communing with his own heart, though not in the same mode. Dunrayne the first to speak.

" Pardon me the question:—does Florence love another?"

Gordon's stately mien was gone, and he answered in a low and hollow voice, " She does."

" And that other is Clanellon?"

" It is."

" False and deceitful as her sex!" shouted the furious Dunrayne, urging, then checking

his horse till he was scarcely manageable. “ He shall not have her, Gordon ! I hate—I abhor him,—he shall not have her ! League with me that he shall not win her.”

Gordon drew back in disgust from the furious speaker, who had approached and was bending towards him.

“ Never ! I said you did not know me. I would risk life to win her love ; but I would not the less risk it to promote her happiness, though this should depend on her union with another.”

Dunrayne turned away abashed.

“ You are a noble creature, Gordon,— you alone deserve her, and I could yield her to you with less reluctance than to any other,” said the rebuked Dunrayne after a few moments’ consideration. “ Let us league then for her good, each applying to the other should his aid be required.”

“ Most willingly !” replied Gordon frankly and fervently, though smiling at the fancy.

“ And now good morning, for I have far to ride.”

“ We part as friends ?”

“ As friends, Lord Dunrayne. You may count on my services when you will : our bond, our regard for her.”

“ You make me blush for myself: I will strive to deserve your friendship.”

The young men shook hands, and putting spurs to their horses, were soon some considerable distance apart. Gordon passed on in his lonely wandering to another land, and Dunrayne pressed forwards to his father’s castle.

Hearing accidentally in Paris of Gordon’s residence at Atherton, he left that city, though expecting his sister, spurred on by jealousy to learn the footing on which he was received, having some suspicion of his love ; but hearing on his route of the visit of Clanellon and a confirmation of the reported union, his fears veered from one to the other. Whilst the feeling, —passion, we should say—(it was Dunrayne’s

misfortune that all his feelings were passions)—remained immovable, the object changed with every changing rumour. Of course his jealousy was now concentrated on Clanellon, and he decided on visiting Atherton as soon after breakfast as etiquette would permit.

The wider the bodily separation between him and Gordon, the wider also became the moral ; and now, no longer shamed from evil, or won to good by his superior influence, passion again resumed its sway ; and by the time he had satisfied his own hunger, and the curiosity of his parents as to his unexpected return, and was mounted ready to depart for Atherton, his mood was scarcely more gentle than when he had encountered Gordon. There is no saying what might have been the consequence of an interview with Clanellon, who had a talent for playing tiger as well as himself ; but, fortunately for both, the trial was spared them.

Just as Dunrayne arrived within sight of the

first gate, Lord Clanellon's travelling carriage passed through it, turning into the London road. The gentlemen bowed as they passed—with what feelings, so hasty was the action, could scarcely be observed; but Dunrayne fancied his rival looked sulky. A second dismissal in one morning was more than should have been hoped—and yet he did hope it, and, urging his horse to perform a few carakolets in the exuberance of his delight, he dashed off at full speed up the Atherton road, making

“The sparkling pebbles hiss and fly.”

But the day was to change in his mind, as days do change in nature, from gloom to shine, from shine to gloom. Mr. Lyle had gone to Fairport by the other road; Miss Lyle had a violent headache—was lying down and could see no one.

“Lying indeed! I suspect,” he muttered as he turned his horse's head, retracing his way with dull and lagging steps. “Must she fall sick, forsooth, because her minion goes? or

does she fear to meet me after her declaration? To be sure, a headache is a legitimate disorder for a lady—one allowed her by all, and at all times."

Whether a bona-fide bodily disorder, or the veil of some mind's pain,—a *nom de guerre* for sorrow, it mattered not, the plea could not be disputed,—but it was not the less provoking on that account.

Florence did suffer from a bona-fide headache; whether from a heartache also, she was not called on to declare—neither are we. Nor had the headache left her when she joined her father at the dinner-table, though she had not left her room during the interval between Lord Clanellon's departure and the announcement of the meal. Mr. Lyle looked at his child's dim eye and pallid cheek with some concern and a little archness, but he made no remark on either; and her attempt at gaiety proved her wish that no remark on either should be made.

“ I pressed Clanellon to return as soon as agreeable to himself, and his answer showed his eagerness to rejoin us. Nothing but his mother’s relapse or absolute business will detain him from us, so that we may expect him shortly. It was friendly of him taking us in his way to town.”

Mr. Lyle spoke with affected carelessness, though his look rested on Florence; but if in the hope of seeing her dull eye illumined, he was disappointed. His daughter was busily engaged in what she appeared to consider a difficult act of carvership,—namely, separating a bunch of grapes,—and neither looked up or spoke till the task was completed; and when she offered some of the tempting fruit to her father, he could perceive no sign of satisfaction in look or manner. Mr. Lyle wondered—we do not. A bunch of exquisite grapes, with their delicate bloom in full beauty, would, in the eyes or taste of some, be a dangerous rival to a viscount any day. Not that we intend to

disparage viscounts, or join in the cry against all the aristocracy. Laugh as you like at our taste; in reply, we only quote a saying of our Gallic neighbours,

“Tous les goûts sont respectables.”

“I am afraid you will find it dull, Florence, now that all our guests have departed, and Lady Emma Dunrayne’s still abroad,” said Mr. Lyle later in the evening. “Had you not better ask Julia Desmond to come to you again? She seemed very loth to go, poor girl, and Clanellon admires her singing.”

“I think it would be scarcely for Julia’s advantage to come to us at present: her aunt having lost both her own children so suddenly, will naturally turn for consolation to her sister’s. It would be unkind and impolitic in Julia to quit her now, as she has much at her disposal, and even she, dear girl, gentle and humble as she is, does vex a little sometimes at the evils of poverty. Never fear my being dull, my kind papa,” playfully caressing him; “I

have oceans of work to do—more than you and all your clerks in the month of April. All the flowers have grown out of order, twining one into the other, because I have not been able to keep an eye upon them. Then my school-children have well nigh forgotten how to read, owing to the absence of my quickening influence; besides, a thousand other things that have gone wrong in the absence of my superintending care whilst engaged nursing you. I shall not have a moment to be dull for the next six months. Or when did I feel it dull when you were with me?"

" You are a cunning flatterer," replied her delighted father, kissing the hand that was caressing him. " There are the fifty pounds you hinted a wish for the other day to rebuild the cottages which were burnt down; the only condition, that you have no headache to-morrow."

" Who would not flatter when so well rewarded?" and her lips pressed her father's brow.

“ Fifty pounds for a few gentle words that the heart would speak !” she exclaimed, holding it up in playful triumph. “ This too when the times are so bad, as Messrs. Milford, Hazel, and Sibthorp—nay, the whole *corps mercantil*, so dolefully assert ! I wonder if they complained of the badness of the times in Adam’s days,—they have done so ever since. Farmers contented with the weather and the price of corn ; merchants with the times, and the rates of duties ;—Oh, are they not a yet undiscovered race — an unknown class in the scale of being ?”

Her father’s admiring smile at her graceful gaiety was chased away by a look of anxiety.

“ It may not be right to grumble at the times, my child ; but this is scarcely the moment to laugh at those who do so. One speculation which is successful, is the parent of many that are ruinous. Our increasing luxury, though it employs hundreds, makes the enormous fortunes of former days appear but as

a sufficiency in these; the greater number of competitors (for trade is held in higher estimation than of late) increases the difficulty of individuals acquiring wealth;—in fine, not to trouble you with prosy details, the merchants of the present day are not what they were during the late war, or immediately after its conclusion. These are things not to be talked of, scarcely to be thought; but a short time may show that the greatest credit is not a certain proof of the greatest wealth. I doubt if some who show a bold brow have not a timid heart."

"I am sorry—very sorry to hear this," said Florence with gentle sympathy. "I had no idea of such things when I laughed at Mr. Hazel's grumbling. May I ask for whom you fear?"

"Walls have ears! I know nothing, and a whisper even in these cases is destruction."

"And young maidens have tongues, and speak louder than a whisper, you would say. Oh, fie, papa! to think that your Florence could

not keep a secret ! I am quite affronted : but I will ask two questions, and must have two answers. No harm threatens the Hultons, I hope ? ”

“ None ! I believe them to be perfectly secure . ”

“ And no harm threatens Mr. Lyle, I hope ? ”

“ None ! I trust he can stand any shock . ”

“ And assist his less fortunate brethren ? ”

“ Will you never learn, Florence, that merchants are utterly selfish—their only hope to make money—their only dread to lose it ? ”

“ Then you are not a merchant, and I am not a merchant’s daughter,” said Florence with a becoming pride.

The conversation of the father and the child traced out most accurately their feelings and employment for many a succeeding day. Florence was scarcely an instant unoccupied : she was in her garden or her school-room, advising, consoling, or assisting her poorer neighbours ; exchanging courtesies and sympathies

with her richer ones, or shedding the light of her watchful love on her doting father.

Surely the common proverb, “Idleness is the root of all evil,” had been branded on her heart with ineffaceable characters. She was always busy—some thought too busy;—the idle and the careless, probably; such are rebuked by activity, and dependants generally dislike being overlooked.

The gardener was getting old, and sometimes his young lady cut a little faster than he could clear away, or she picked some favourite seed on which he had set his eye half an hour before he thought it was ripe, and this did not please him; so he set himself to find out something to warrant his discontent, and in due time he told old nurse, with an awful shake of the head, that “he did not like his young lady’s ways,—she was not as she had been. She worked harder, but she did not seem to admire the flowers as she used to do,—she did not stand still and look at them with her own sweet

smile; and sometimes she would cut things down just a-coming into blow, as if they was dying away,—and smell to flowers that had no scent, and yet did not seem to find it out."

Nurse shook her head mysteriously, but excused her young lady on account of having nursed her father so long. "And it must be dull now for the poor child, all alone till the evening," she added.

Some only found her activity troublesome, and others thought her impatient for Lord Clanellon's return, which all knew was expected. We agree with the old gardener and the idle workmen:—her great and constant activity was suspicious—a bad symptom—a sign of a wounded heart. For the young it is generally delightful to look back—beautiful to look forward: when the heart dares do neither, it has been in error, or is in sorrow. It will not think, because it will not amend; or because the darkness of the past, the threatening gloom of the future, if dwelt upon, will

unnerve the mind and unfit it for its duties, or sadden those it loves.

“ We have been very stupid lately ; suppose you issue cards for two grand dinner-parties,” said Mr. Lyle to Florence the evening of the day on which the old gardener had related his grievance to nurse.

“ Certainly, if you wish it,” replied Florence in surprise. “ But do you think it would appear kind to the Milfords and others whose affairs you have just told me are becoming more embarrassed every hour ? I understood from you that their misfortunes could not be concealed much longer.”

“ I think not ; and that is the very reason why I wish the cards issued, and this evening too, before a failure can be announced : it might then seem unfeeling, now it cannot. Our dinners will not injure them, and prudence requires us to give them.”

“ Prudence, my dear father !”

“ Yes, prudence, Florence : but do not look

so distressed. I hear some of our neighbours accuse us of getting stingy, or stupid—or, worse than all, poor. As I told you before, a suspicion may destroy, and now is not the time when the accusation of poverty may be made with impunity."

"Suspicion, dearest father!—what can you mean?" taking both his hands in hers and looking earnestly into his face.

"I mean nothing as alarming as you imagine, my child," replied her father, trying to reassure her: "I am anxious to avoid a suspicion that could at the worst only cause me a little annoyance, more for the sake of others than myself. Fears, if fed, soon become panics, and ruin many who a few months before or after could pay all and still be rich. It is the duty of every one in these times, as Mrs. Hazel says, to maintain the credit of the body through individuals. If one suffers, all suffer: a general mistrust is a general distress;—none wholly escape."

“ But will two grand dinner-parties keep up a failing credit? In my humble opinion, it would be better maintained by a strict and prudent economy.”

“ Perhaps it might, if all were like Florence Lyle,” said her father a little impatiently: “ but all are not, and the multitude judge from outward show. Our late seclusion has been remarked on; some hint has transpired of the necessity of Gordon’s interference, and we must do nothing that can warrant further comment. So write the cards,— and I wish you would be seen a little more in Fairport, and use your new carriage. Then some say my child dresses plainly—too plainly for her father’s reputed fortune.”

“ Because I do not rival the gorgeous Mrs. Sibthorp, or mock some eastern bird by exhibiting the whole range of primitive colours. No libel on my taste, papa, if you please.”

“ I know you care little for dress or show,” said her smiling father; “ but there are some who read great events in the merest trifles.”

“ I will do as you please in all things:—provide an alderman’s feast, dress like a parroquet, and drive about in my new carriage as though I had never driven in one of my own before; but surely, my dearest father, since we have no cause to dread suspicion, we may despise it; and by not entering into further expense, shall have more to assist the sufferers.”

Florence spoke timidly, though earnestly, for she had remarked her father’s unusual impatience.

“ It is impossible, my child, for you to understand these things. You always imagine people as kind and reasonable as yourself; but I know the world a little better. Connected and mingled as are merchants’ interests in a time of general distress, no one can without the possibility of loss despise suspicion, since at such a time there must be difficulty in calling in his riches, however great, to meet the sudden demands of fear. Your new carriage is paid for; a handsome gown and two dinners

will not quite cost a million ; and in return for my having employed no technical terms, you must believe me when I say, that the course I would pursue is the best for the interests of our own correspondents, the whole mercantile body, and ourselves. My child does not suspect me of dishonour ?”

“ She might suspect herself — she could not suspect you.”

“ You are a delightful flatterer, my own Florence. Now take the pen.”

“ Yes, some of my choicest writing ; and to-morrow, I will dress my gayest—look my best — drive into Fairport to bring you out — flirt with all the merchants and their clerks — bow and smile to the mobility, and outdo the Member in condescension and popularity : they shall positively think that you intend to stand at the next election. Will this do, and will you be answerable for all my improprieties ?”

“ For all, Florence ;” but he said it sadly, seeing that her gaiety was forced.

Florence visited Fairport the next day as she had promised, ordered a new dress to be made up which she had purchased before, and executed a long list of commissions, some household, some belonging to her own private charities. Her orders were everywhere thankfully received—more so than usual, she thought. She forced herself to converse gaily with all her acquaintance—and she met many,—who wondered they had ever thought her reserved: her manner was just what they admired. But though the tradesmen were thankful and active, her friends in general glad to see her and willing to converse, she fancied that the town of Fairport did not look as gay as in former times — its bustling inhabitants not as happy in their bustle as was their wont. Traces of anxiety appeared on the countenances of many, dispelled on a sudden lest they should attract observation, and then returning in greater force ; and she looked with suspicion on several groups of cautious merchants and sober tradesmen, whose

looks were dull, their conversation low and earnest. Nor was her father's manner, as he entered the carriage to return with her, calculated to disperse her suspicions.

"I have been thinking Fairport and its thrifty multitude looked dull to-day; and I fancied I heard the name of Milford repeated more than once. Has anything fresh occurred?" asked Florence as they drove from the counting-house.

"What I knew must happen, within a week, has happened within a day. Milford's house stopped payment this morning, and for a much larger amount than was expected."

"The poor Milfords!" said Florence: "I promised the children some toys, and will take them over to-morrow. I hope you have heard nothing else unpleasant: this was only an expected event a little hastened."

"Yes, there is worse news than this,—another and totally unlooked-for failure — Threlfall's and Dobson's bank, to an immense amount;

and their stopping will, I fear, involve many others."

" Will it embarrass you, my dear father? I am becoming very selfish; but you have an anxious look that makes me tremble."

" You are too sensitive, my child: our resources are immense. I had a tolerable sum in Threlfall's house, and I am vexed to lose it for many reasons; one, that I left it there contrary to Gordon's advice many months ago. I gave up all share in the bank long since, neither liking Threlfall's character nor his proceedings, but consented to let them retain this money, paying a fair interest; and when I proposed withdrawing it at Gordon's suggestion, Dobson seemed so hurt that I foolishly gave up the point, and shall scarcely receive three shillings in the pound.—By the bye, if I play the fool, neither Gordon nor Walton should suffer by my folly, since both have advised me better. The mortgage on which their money was lent has just been redeemed; so it shall be

returned to them, to place where they please : I will have no more to do with it."

" I thought you said this sum was nothing to you, your resources were so great ?"

" I did so. Do not turn so pale and look so anxious ; believe me, you have no cause for either : the worst will be a few thousands less for your fortune, and that you will little heed, though my pride may, for I wished my Florence to carry a dowry in proportion to my love. You young maidens think little of the vexation to a man of business of losing a few thousands by his want of decision and foresight : it will annoy him though he should have millions left."

" If that is really all, I shall not grieve much, though I know the value of wealth ; but from your returning Walton's money, I feared you anticipated greater evil."

" The greatest evil I anticipate is not being able to dissolve partnership with Sawyer just at present. The money in Threalfall's hands which

was to have been his, is gone ; and as the mercantile world is now, no change is prudent,—particularly as he is one of those who can guide the opinions of others without appearing to do so."

" You have had no fresh cause to mistrust him, I hope ?"

" None ! on the contrary, he appears to rival Walton in caution, and defers to my opinion in all things."

" Did you ever name your wish that the partnership should be dissolved ?"

" Just after my recovery I hinted such a course, in my vexation at his conduct during my illness ; and, by our agreement, it rests with me to fix the time, though at no longer notice than four-and-twenty hours, for he brought a mere trifle into the house. I should have entered on the subject some days since, but for these expected failures : as I did not, I dare say he has forgotten what I said before."

" Mr. Sawyer forgets nothing," remarked Florence thoughtfully.

"A valuable talent for a man of business: I find him very useful."

"What has been, may be," said Florence still more thoughtfully.

"Not whilst I have health to hold control," replied her father a little impatiently. "You and Gordon judge him harshly, and think me too easily persuaded.—Let us talk of other matters. Have you received answers to your invitations?"

"Some, and all as yet in the affirmative."

"So much the better. I am glad the cards were issued before we heard of Milford's failure: I should not have felt comfortable in sending them immediately afterwards."

That evening, and the next day, and the next, for more than a fortnight, brought rumours of failures that were expected or had taken place,—some false, some true, as is the wont. The failure of the large house of the Milfords involved in a like misfortune two or three smaller ones dependant on it, and em-

barrassed others. The closing of Threlfall's bank occasioned more general distress. Nor were the failures confined to Fairport and other provincial towns: in the capital itself more than one considerable house and several minor ones were compelled to suspend payment. It was a season of sadness to all connected with commerce and commercial men; and Florence felt deeply for the anxieties of those around her, showing a gentle sympathy and thoughtful attention to all within her reach.

The dinners took place, and the tables were full,—for none chose to decline, though many would willingly have stayed away. Florence exerted herself in her part of hostess, and her father tried to look as happy as usual; but both felt that the parties had been dull. There was an evident restraint among the guests: if not absolutely acting parts, they were not entirely natural. The knives and forks were as busily plied, but the tongues were allowed more rest: there was little talk of bonds, and

mortgages, and debentures—under present circumstances, those were too delicate topics to be touched on with perfect freedom in a mixed circle—if ventured on at all, the subject was generally broken off abruptly. Another thing of note was, that not one pleaded poverty: the word was not heard above once or twice throughout the evening, applied to the lower class only, and even then pronounced with timidity. Not one said “I am too poor for this, or that.” The words were a jest, a safe jest before; now they might prove a dangerous gravity.

Sometimes a guest starting from a reverie would look anxiously round to note if his abstraction had been remarked; then, fancying suspicion where none existed, would dash into hurried and confused conversation. The gloomy spell of doubt and distrust was upon all and through all. Neighbours and former intimates looked into each other's faces with prying and fearful eyes: their speech showed politeness, but they shrunk from too much warmth, lest it

should be the prelude to a demand for, or appear a pledge of aid,—a demand almost equally ruinous to be granted or refused. The general distrust and alarm were making all cautious—may we not say selfish? Thoughts, and hopes, and fears, were centring fast in self, and self alone. The common mind may maintain its place under common circumstances; the truly great alone overcome the trials of prosperity or adversity, showing a humble thankfulness in one, a generous sympathy not hardened by its own suffering in the other; not priding themselves on the first, not envying in the last.

Perhaps, of all the guests, Mr. Sibthorp was least changed;—with little feeling at any time for others, and no dread for himself, the general suffering but slightly troubled him.

“They deserve to fail for not being more prudent in their speculations, and my credit will stand the higher,” was his thought; and he refused assistance to his own uncle, who had

sheltered him in childhood, though that assistance would have saved him from failure, with little risk to himself.

“But your own uncle!” pleaded some one.

“He is older than I am, and should have known better.”

“It will bring a slur upon your name.”

“What care I for a name? Every one knows that John Sibthorp is not Thomas Sibthorp:—I am above family pride.”

Above family pride?—alas! the deceitfulness of the human heart!—below family love and sympathy.

“The walrus of merchants indeed!” thought Florence, as she saw him leaning back in his chair, exhausted by the exertion of devouring a superabundance of delicacies. The carriages were ordered early, and it would have been difficult to decide which were the most pleased at their departure—the entertained or the entertainers. The host certainly felt relieved as the last carriage drove away: he thought he

had intercepted some sly, cautious looks at his pictures, as if the observers were reckoning what they would sell for, and he was annoyed.

It would be scarcely possible to describe Mr. Lyle's feelings during the three weeks succeeding the first failure. None of the other suspensions of payment had affected him materially, and he was perfectly sincere in his assurance to Florence, that the resources of his house were sufficient to withstand any shock, from the large sums in investments, too secure to be affected by any mercantile distress, however general; and yet at times he felt restless — fretted by gloomy anxiety which he could not dispel, for which he could not account. When Florence remarked it, he attributed it to the lingering effects of his late illness.

He was like a stag enclosed in the hunter's circle. He had received no injury—he had no positive reason for believing that he should encounter any — he knew not what he expected; yet, as the circle narrowed round him, a gloomy

and indefinite dread crept over his spirits, and each fresh failure or rumour of failure appeared a fearful contraction of the space.

Another vexation! — he had seen or heard nothing of Clanellon. “Was he deterred by the visible uncertainty of mercantile wealth from pursuing his suit? But no! Clanellon was above this, and really loved his child.”

“Have you any commands for London, Florence?” asked her father, entering the room abruptly a few days after the dinner-parties.

“What do you mean?” inquired Florence, starting up, alarmed at his haggard look.

“Nothing very alarming, my child; but Fairport is not a particularly pleasant abode just at present, and I want a little gaiety, so start for town to-night.”

“To-night!” repeated Florence, looking earnestly at him. “No common occurrence could have moved you thus. You must tell your child all: she claims your confidence”— taking his hand and gently compelling him to sit beside her.

The confidence she claimed was not withheld. The morning's post had brought an account of the positive failure of one large house in town and the probable failure of another, both connected with Mr. Lyle, and whose suspension of payment must materially affect him. Both had been considered perfectly safe, and both held large sums belonging to Mr. Lyle: one, as a temporary advance, at good interest, for a promising and little riskful speculation,—at least so the borrower had averred; the other, money paid in by foreign merchants, which had not been remitted as requested, and on which Mr. Lyle had reckoned in case of any unexpected demand. It was in the hope of saving some part of this that he was hastening to town, though he admitted his presence was much required in the country, and allowed an expression to escape him which showed that he was not as well satisfied as formerly with Mr. Sawyer, though he could bring no specific charge against him. A failure or even a tem-

porary suspension of payment he still treated as an idle chimera—an event that could not be ; but loss to a large amount was now inevitable, and the future full of anxiety.

Florence thought of Gordon as of one whose activity and judgment might be of great avail, but some secret feeling prevented her naming him ; and her father either had not the idea, or did not choose to act upon it. After their last conversation, he could not have recalled him without ungenerous selfishness. Other concerns and connexions, besides those already mentioned, wore a threatening aspect ; but the detail would be uninteresting to the general reader, and we are not writing for the warning, or information of mercantile men—we do not expect or wish such to read our work, not presuming to lecture on political economy in any of its branches. Common-place as we are, we should be contented to find our income, if we had one, fructify in our pockets, without any troublesome questions as to the how or the why.

That Mr. Lyle was in a state of feverish excitement, arising from his late and present anxiety, and perhaps the lingering effects of his severe illness, Florence saw with regret and alarm ; but her offer to accompany him was declined, as her presence would impede his speed ; and he hoped to return in three days, or a week at furthest. Their conversation was short and hurried, as Mr. Lyle had returned for some papers, and to bid her adieu, lest she should be alarmed, and only waited till his servant had prepared his valise, and fresh horses were put to his carriage.

“ Bless you, my child !” said the father, folding her in his arms. “ Keep a good heart, and fear nothing. I will write as soon as I know anything, and hope to return within the week. — I may still be the first merchant in Fairport, despite Sibthorp’s sneer,” he added as he crossed the lofty hall and entered the chariot ready to receive him.

The feverish spots on her father’s cheek, the

unwonted brightness of his eye, and his too evident anxiety, were circumstances which Florence brooded on in pain and dread. She had declined going to the Hultons, as her father had proposed, since his absence would be so short—or rather, though she did not say so, because she wished to be alone. Lady Emma Dunrayne was the only person she would have received with pleasure; yet when a letter arrived from her a few hours after, its contents were anything but welcome, if one might judge from the painful start on their perusal, the ashy lips that gasped for breath, the contracted brow, and then the hiding the face with the trembling hands, as if she feared that the eyes of the pictured beings round her should look down upon her suffering.

The letter was certainly hurried, and gave no account of the Parisian fashions. For which of these reasons did it displease her?—for one? for both? or for neither? We leave the reader to decide.

FROM LADY EMMA DUNRAYNE TO MISS LYLE.

“Paris.

“MY DEAR FLORENCE,

“AN inexorable diplomatist allows me but half an hour to inform you that I and my friends arrived in Paris three days since ; the hollow murmurs among the gloomy pines and the rushing noise of the mighty cataracts of Switzerland still sounding in my ears, and mingling strangely with the meaner and less exciting sounds of a Parisian crowd. My eye is weary with its gazing on Parisian wonders, as a child's with a kaleidoscope. Dunrayne has departed again — flown none know whither ; some think to Belgium, some to Germany, and some to England. East, west, north, or south — who shall track his erratic course ? You refused to become his guide, and he has been a wandering comet ever since. Cruel Florence ! I should have so loved you as a sister ! and some think one viscount is as good as another.

“Despite our fatigues, we attended a grand ball at our ambassador's the night before last : and who do you think solicited the honour of being my cicerone, and furnishing me with a *catalogue raisonné* of the lions there assembled ? No less a person than Sir Charles Cleveland !—that Sir Charles Cleveland on whose account I was once nearly looked to stone, because I ventured to hint that he was as agreeable as a certain Walter Gordon—the gentleman clerk, as Dunrayne used to call him in spite ; — and this when you had never seen him ! To be sure, I had spent but ten days in the baronet's company. What then ? Madame de Staël knew a person thoroughly in ten minutes—or thought so. Not but that Walter Gordon was a favourite of mine, and at that time a favourite with another ; and so I had no chance of being first in his estimation—my superlative worth was nothing !—my brightest virtue then was the being your friend ! Alack and a well-a-day ! how things change ! I thought something

would come of it, as old nurse says,—or as they say more elegantly here, *qui vivra verra*. I little dreamt in former days, when, forgetting you had been saying ‘Walter Gordon’ for months, you called the gentleman ‘Mr. Gordon,’ and would not name his name unless provoked to it by my abuse, that the time would come when I might jest and rally you on change ! I was simple enough to think you destined to be united ; and now each weds another.

“ ‘ Who is that elegant fairy-like being with whom Mr. Gordon is conversing, and who looks up in his face so bewitchingly, and listens to his words so earnestly, as if her life were in his tones ? I see a vision of cake and favours.’

“ ‘ I hope you will participate in the reality,’ replied Sir Charles with a sunny smile—few smile like him. ‘ That fairy-like being is my sister.’

“ ‘ I beg your pardon, Sir Charles ; I had no idea—I did not mean——’

“ ‘ Do not apologise, Lady Emma, and deny your meaning. I would rather call Gordon brother than any other in his Britannic Majesty’s dominions.’

“ ‘ I may consider it a settled point then?’

“ ‘ I trust so ! But Louisa is timid, and you must not rally.’

“ ‘ Doubt not my discretion !’

“ So Walter Gordon weds Louisa Cleveland, and Florence Lyle weds Lord Clanellon. Truly this is a marvellous world !—a world of change. Or perhaps I was but as a blind kitten in those days,—not arrived at my nine days’ sight. Well, all must choose for themselves—or will. By the way, it would have been as polite and friendly in you to have openly stated your intended marriage, as only to have admitted the truth of the report by your silence when I named it : and your last letter might have been longer, considering that you had two of mine to answer and an accepted lover to describe. I might have doubted, but all Paris—that is,

its English—asserts it, and Sir Charles knows it as a fact. You and Walter Gordon should be married on the same day—at the same church—by the same clergyman,—that would make the unnatural romance complete. I shall arrange it thus, since I am to be your bridesmaid,—a promise made a hundred years ago. Take care that you are not poisoned or poniarded ! Your *dévoué*, I hear, might select a harem, if in these changing times he could but be made a sultan. Write, and tell me the how, the when, and the where ; and present my respects to the bridegroom elect.—Yet I have a little grudge at your choice. Gordon is a noble creature, and I could have forgiven your preferring him to Dunrayne, but not Clanellon. I wish you could hear Sir Charles speak of his friend !—he is positively beautiful whilst pouring forth his generous and glowing praises of Walter Gordon. You need not laugh ; of course I mean the beauty of the mind ;—not that Sir Charles is ill-looking. I wish too you

could have seen his gentle sister's blush when her brother introduced me as a friend of Gordon's. It was lovely—absolutely poetical: it would have awakened ideality in an old Jew clothesman. The tiresome diplomatist is here—too ill-tutored to conceal his impatience, and I must say adieu.

“With a thousand loves,
“Yours most affectionately,
“EMMA DUNRAYNE.”

“Write, or I shall proclaim that Gordon having played you false, you marry Clanellon out of pique. Fie, Monsieur Diplomatiste! deny a woman a postscript! forbid the rose her bulbul's song!”

Could the lively Emma but have guessed the effect of her letter—could she have seen her friend sitting at her window hour after hour in the silence of the night, the silver moon shedding on her ashy cheek and quivering lip its pale and sickly light, one hand sup-

porting her throbbing temples, the other striving to still the as wildly throbbing heart,—how she would have grieved for her gay words, and thrown her arms around her, and kissed away the falling tears! But Emma did not guess it—did not know it till long after, or she would have blamed herself for the pique and vexation she had shown at a stranger's being preferred to Dunrayne.

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CHAPTER II.

Through the thistle-field of life.

KOSEGARTEN.

My faither did na speak ;
But he look'd in my face, till my heart was like to break ;
So I promis'd my hand when my heart was far away.

Auld Robin Gray.

THE promised letter came from Mr. Lyle ; and Florence pressed it to her lips before she broke the seal, with hands trembling from her eagerness. If severed from one object of our love, do we not cling the more fondly to those yet left us ? Could it be this feeling which appeared to draw still closer the bond of affection which bound her to her father ?

The contents of the letter, though of no

very decided character, were cheering rather than otherwise. If he had not recovered the money, he had some hopes of success, but must wait the return of one of the partners then absent. The other house reported to have failed might yet be saved; and some thought that mercantile distress had passed its greatest height, and better times were coming. He hoped to be with her in two or three days. He had seen Clanellon, who had shown him every attention, and hoped to visit Atherton very shortly, only having been hitherto detained by some business of his father's.

This last piece of intelligence was far from pleasing; and Florence now deeply regretted not having spoken to her father on the subject, instead of trusting to her own manner to check the viscount's distasteful attentions. Unhappily her regrets come often late — too late to allow of reparation.

The other parts of the letter should have calmed her anxiety, but they did not: she

read in the tracing of his letters, in the formation of his sentences—even in his affectionate expressions towards herself, a feverish excitement and restlessness that alarmed her, and she waited his return with impatience. Nor had she many days to wait: she heard his step in the hall on the sixth evening after his departure, and sprang forward to meet him.

“ My father ! my dear, dear father !” she exclaimed, her head sinking on his shoulder, and the tears she had so long struggled to suppress falling on his bosom.

“ My child ! my own sweet child !” said her father, folding her in his arms, kissing away her falling tears, and then placing her on a sofa beside him, her pale face still resting on his shoulder, his arm still twining round her. Neither spoke till the servant who brought lights had again left the room.

“ You have been anxious, my child,—too anxious,” said the doting father, startled as the light shining full upon her showed him the

change which those few short days had caused. “ You have been ill, Florence ;—you suffer now !” he exclaimed in increasing fear as he marked the sudden contraction of the marble brow.

“ No, not now,” faltered Florence, trembling in his arms ; then looking up to cheer him with a smile,—a smile changed into a start of alarm more than equal to his own as she gazed on his haggard countenance.

“ You too have been anxious—too anxious,” she said, looking on him with sad and tender earnestness. “ I feared it from your letter, and I see it now. Is there anything more to fear ? or is this change only the effects of past anxiety ?” pressing his burning hand in hers.

“ Nothing more to fear now, I hope ; so hush your fears.”

His voice sounded hollow in her ears, and she thought he shuddered : his eye, at least, lost not its wild glare, and he seemed glad to talk of other things, for he ordered refresh-

ments, and, she remarked, drank large draughts of wine, complaining of a burning thirst.

“ Did you succeed in recovering any of the money ?” asked Florence timidly after the servant had withdrawn, seeing that her father had sunk into a reverie of no pleasant description, to judge by the gloom upon his brow.

“ Recover ? No ! no ! the fellow was wiser than that : the jade Fortune might have changed again ! Fool that I was to stake so much upon a die ! I, who have mocked at the folly of younger men, thus to complete the ruin which others had begun ! Madman !—But how did you know all this, Florence ? who told you of your father’s disgrace ?” he demanded with wild and startling vehemence, grasping her arm as he spoke. “ Is it the common talk of the idle ? — the babble of the rabble rout ?” he demanded sternly. “ Speak !” for Florence had been too much startled to reply.

“ You are talking wildly, my dear father,” she answered soothingly. “ Who should—who

could tell me of disgrace, when there is no disgrace to tell of? I only know that you have been seeking to recover money from Hansom's house: if you failed, there is no disgrace in that."

"No disgrace?—I say there is disgrace—and guilt too!" he continued wildly. "The very boys and the rabble will know my shame, and hoot. And they will have a right to do so too. Is it not shame that a man of my years—a steady merchant from his childhood, with none of the wild passions of youth to plead in excuse—a father blessed with such a child, should go to the house of the gambler and stake thousands—nay, tens of thousands,—ay, and lose them too,—and that when his house was tottering to its fall? Is not this shame,—sin—sin towards God and man?"

"It cannot be!" said Florence quickly, as if the bold denial could soothe him, and still her own increasing fears,—"It cannot be! you

never gamed in all your life ! You are ill, dear father—you are feverish, — you have been excited and fatigued, want rest and quiet. Lie down, and let me watch beside you."

" I tell you that it can be — that it is !" he replied, so fiercely that his child shook in every limb, shrinking from his look. " Why can it not be ? Does Robert Lyle tell lies ? Not yet !—but he will come to that soon—doubt it not ! Who sins and stops ? It cannot be, because I never gamed before — because I censured those who did, and mocked their folly ? Should such things save ? they but increase my guilt. I say again, it is so ! It is a strange tale ; but you shall know all, — how Robert Lyle, the great merchant, has ruined himself and all who trusted him, and made his child a beggar. You shall hear, but no one else ;" sinking his voice to a whisper which, low as it was, seemed endowed with a force and clearness that might have awakened him who had slept for ages. Putting his lips close to his child's ear, he continued —

“ Delay was a deceit of Hansom's to gain time and favour his own friends. Masham too has failed, and neither will pay four shillings in the pound. I knew we should require money, and tried to borrow; — none would lend. I would have withdrawn sums placed out in divers ways, but had not the necessary papers, as Sawyer has generally transacted that part of the business, purchasing many of the shares in other names from prudential reasons. I found what I had considered a perfectly safe investment no longer so, yet was unable to withdraw my advance. I was overcome—harassed—not myself: my blood boiled in my veins—it seemed on fire. I met Clanellon, who insisted on my dining with him, aplogising for the presence of another guest whom I should not much like, but whom he had been obliged to invite, that being the only time he could fix to conclude some business, the arrangements of which for his father had detained the viscount from us. I ate nothing, but I drank

much, to satisfy my thirst, which was intense. Mr. Hislop was lively and pleasant ; he talked of the sums acquired by gaming, till —

“ But what needs a long tale ? Clanellon was suddenly called away on urgent business, but he begged I would remain as long as I pleased, promising to return if he could. I was left alone with the tempter, and I yielded. I went with him to a gaming-house, I said for curiosity. He played and won : he talked of thousands gained by the mere throwing of the dice — riches acquired in an hour. I saw the glittering gold before me — I thought of my difficulties — and resisted no longer.

“ I played with a stranger of the name of Shaw : I won — I doubled my stakes, again I won — I hoped to free myself from all embarrassments. I played for higher stakes — lost, — played on to retrieve the loss, and rose from the table a loser of seventy thousand pounds, with no money to discharge the debt on the in-

stant, the horror of my name in the Gazette glaring before my eyes—the execrations of my creditors sounding in my ears. I gave my bond: it was considered sufficient, my house being well known.

“ It was a cold sunless dawn when I left the house alone ; for Hislop had gone some time before, after vainly urging me to accompany him, since the run of luck seemed so hard against me. The chill morning air was a shock to my fevered blood : it seemed to give clearness—horrid clearness—to the past, the present, and the future. There was only ruin before me ! I will not tell you what fearful thoughts came over me—I loathed myself, and I shrank from the gaze of man. I trembled as I thought of you—I longed to die in your arms, yet I feared to meet your look. I had brought disgrace upon you : you would love—you would soothe me still—you would breathe no murmur,—but you would pine away in your father’s shame. We might never have met again—I was

wandering I knew not whither, when Clanellon met me, on his return from the relative's by whom he had been summoned, and where he had stayed late. He soothed, he calmed — he would not leave me, — he forced me to return with him, insisted on my taking rest ; and when I woke from my forced sleep late in the day, he was by my side, and before I had recovered a full recollection of my madness, he put into my hand the bond I had given to Mr. Shaw. A friend had discharged the debt—that friend was himself.

“ I strove to thank him, but he would not listen. He rejoiced that the having been left heir to his uncle, who had lately died, enabled him to prove his regard for me — his love for you. It was a large sum — he did not deny that ; but I ought to feel no scruple in taking it from one whom I had consented to receive as a son : if I still hesitated, I could give him a bond — I could not fear that he would press for payment : — for his part, he would rather rely

solely on my honour ; — or the settlements, to satisfy my delicacy, should be arranged accordingly. He has saved me from ruin ; but there is still disgrace. My child will go a comparative beggar to his arms, when I had hoped to give her with a princely dower. The world will say that he has bought my Florence—child of my love—pride of my heart !”

“ No, no !” gasped Florence with a shudder, fearing that her doom was sealed. She might —she would struggle ; but there were fearful odds against her. The father misunderstood her : he took for womanly delicacy, what was dislike and terror.

“ Yes, my child, the cruel world would say so, if it knew—and it does know all things—that the guilty wish concealment.” Then, alarmed by the chilling coldness of her hand, his shrill, piercing whisper was changed into a more natural and soothing tone. “ But do not fear, my child ; he will not say so : he is kind and generous, and truly loves you. I had said you

should be his before—I would have released him from the engagement on that fatal night, but he prayed me to forbear. He sought you for yourself alone, not from mercenary motives. Clanellon does indeed love my child."

"No! no!" exclaimed Florence wildly. "He cannot—he does not—I will never be Clanellon's wife;—in pity, ask it not!"

"Hush! hush! my child," replied her father still more soothingly, confirmed in his former belief. "You must not speak so rashly nor think so hardly of Clanellon. You wrong him if you doubt his love. Could you have heard him, you would doubt no longer. He loves you, Florence—loves you as I loved your mother,—as first and all in the wide world. He will not despise my child—believe it not! he will not prize her the less that she is no longer rich! You doubt still: this is ungenerous to him—to me. Though proud of my child, I would be proud for her too. Had there been the faintest show of doubt or hesitation, he should not have

had my Florence: but there was not, yet I watched him jealously. And why should he have paid the money if he loved you not?"

His words brought no consolation—his question was a pain. At length she spoke, but her words were scarcely audible.

"I know not why he did all this—I do not wish to know—but you will not force me to be his?" she said, looking up in his face with a passionate pleading. "I do not love him!"

"Not love Clanellon!" exclaimed her father with frightful vehemence, nearly flinging her from his arms, so sudden was his start,—"Not love Clanellon! Then I am a lost and ruined man! I cannot pay him; — and I pledged you to him."

"You will not cast me off?" she pleaded.

"Cast you off, my child?—no, never!" encircling her again with his arm.

"You will not bid me wed him?" clinging to him, though frightened at his violence.

"Not if you do not love him."

“ Bless you, my father, for those words !”
her head again sinking on his shoulder.

He looked down on that pale face, and his strong frame trembled.

“ Tell me, Florence,—and speak the truth,—as you hope for heaven, do you love Clanellon ? If not, I am a wretch indeed !”

He waited for her answer, but Florence spoke not : there was an awful sternness in his manner that made her fear ; her eyes closed—she could not bear to look upon his agony.

“ You do not speak,” he said after a while, in a tone that gradually became more calm and assured till it was almost playful,—“ You do not speak, and we know what a maiden’s silence means. You do love him, Florence, and I was a simpleton to doubt it. You do love him—you have never loved another !”

He felt her shudder in his arms ; he heard a choking sob, a painful murmur ; but he distinguished no word, and proceeded—

“ No, Florence, I have watched you with a

father's love—a father's care: you never loved till you knew Clanellon. Do not shake those dark curls in denial, murmuring words which you dare not speak out boldly: I know all—I have seen all—and there is no cause for shame or trembling. He came, sanctioned by me, at his father's request, to win your favour. I did not tell you this, lest I should seem to dictate; but I saw you guessed it. You were ever candid; and had you said at any time, 'I cannot love him,' he should have gone, although my heart was on the match. But you did not tell me so, and I read your feelings even in your scrupulous reserve: you feared to seem too ready to be won. I saw it, and Clanellon saw it too: the eye of love sees love, though no other see it. And happy—most happy am I that it is so. If not, I never could have looked upon my child again. That dreadful night! that fearful dawn! I dared not think—I could not pray; Clanellon was as my guardian angel! he saved me from destruction—he yet

gives me a chance to retrieve my falling fortunes, and this because he loves my child. The bond may be redeemed hereafter ; he has influence with two of the first houses in the capital, and will procure me present aid. I want no more—there is enough to pay all demands, and give me a chance of retrieving my affairs ; but I cannot now avail myself of the funds. Had you not loved him, nor he loved you, I had been ruined past all hope. I would not have seen my name in the Gazette, and that through my own deed, a shame and a reproach to my innocent child, and the father who reared me :—I should have returned no more. There was a demon whispering in my ear !—my heart sickens at the thought, and sense fails. You will pity me, my child ; you will offer thanks that I was spared—was saved. I may not escape from future shame save through Clan-ellon's love for you : I shall owe all to my sweet child, and she must thank him for her father when he comes to-morrow.”

“ To-morrow ! No ! no !” gasped his shrinking daughter.

“ Yes, my child, do not doubt me ! He was too delicate to come to-night, knowing the shameful tale I had to tell ; but he comes to-morrow, for he is not far away, to receive you at my hands—to plead his cause with his own lips. There is no cause for blushing—he will not pain your gentleness, and you must not refuse to see him. Lay the blame upon your father,—say it was at his command ;—and so it is. I have pledged you to him :—you would not make your father break his word ?”

Florence raised her head with a convulsive start ; her livid lips quivered, but did not open ; the cold hand relaxed its grasp ; the corpse-like cheek sank again on her father's shoulder ; and for a time she was spared from further suffering.

When Florence again unclosed her eyes, her father was kneeling beside her, chafing her hands ; whilst nurse was bending over her, bath-

ing her temples with *eau de Cologne*. She half rose, looked round; then, as memory became more clear, sank back with a sigh and a slight shudder, again closing her eyes, as if by so doing she could shut out the thought of what had been—of what might be.

“ Shall we send for the doctor, sir?” asked nurse.

“ No,” murmured Florence with an opposing motion of her hand: “ I am better now, I shall be quite well soon.”

The exertion brought a more life-like look to her deathy cheek; her attached and anxious observers felt their fears relieved, and nurse soon after left the room, as Florence declared herself quite recovered. The father and child were left alone; yet for a time neither spoke, though both felt the silence oppressive.

“ You are too sensitive, dearest, and I was too abrupt; but my brain seemed on fire, and I scarcely knew what my lips said. Clanellon will be here to-morrow: he will soothe and reassure you.”

Gentle and fond as was his tone, Florence shrunk from the speaker for the first time in her life, and withdrawing her hand from his, covered her face, whilst a cold shiver came across her. A sob as from one choking for breath, made her look up. There knelt her father by her side, his face buried in his hands, the large tears forcing their way between his fingers, his broad chest heaving strongly.

It is sad to see a child weep ; thus proving that it has already begun its mortal race,—that the curse of sin is on it — sorrow and trouble, weariness and woe. But then those sobs are quickly hushed, and the bright eyes look out through their long lashes, and the pouting lips uncurl with a brilliant smile : the whole face is lighted up again into beauty—the beauty of an April day, when the sun shines forth from behind a cloud ; and we love it the more for its transient shadowing, and think it never shone so radiantly before. The child forgets its grief—laughs childhood's own light, witching laugh, as though

it had never known a sorrow, and goes on its course happy in its blindness to the future. We cannot deeply mourn for what we see is so soon forgotten; we look on a child's tears with a real but transient sadness.

It is more sad to look on the tears of the young and gentle girl, just bursting into womanhood. The spell of youthful hope is no longer perfect—experience bounds its power. She has scarcely crossed the threshold into life, and yet we feel that reality has come upon her in its bitterness. She struggles with her destiny, and we know too well that that is what her life must henceforth be—a struggle and a warfare; but her young heart shrinks from the truth, and she still clings to hopes that woo her to fresh sorrow.

The tears of the matron are sadder still to look upon; for we feel that they flow from a deeper, sterner cause. She weeps no longer for a feeling or a thought: she has learned there is no luxury in grief, for she has

felt its agony ; she shrinks from sorrow, for she knows its reality. If her tears flow, it is because she cannot keep them back. Yet to woman those tears are a relief ; she feels them to be such—and those who see them feel so too, and the sadness of their sympathy is lightened. But it is not so when we look on the tears which fall from man ;—not the tears of boyhood or of dotage, but those wrung from the heart of bold and hardy manhood : such are wrung forth only by the very intensity of agony. It is against his habits and his pride—it is thought a shame to his manhood that tears should fall ; and when they do fall, their falling is not only a proof, but an aggravation of his suffering.

It is a harrowing and a fearful sight to see a strong man weep.

“ My father ! my dear father !” said Florence, throwing her arms fondly round him, and falling on his neck as he knelt beside her. But he did not speak — he did not remove

his hands, though he trembled at her words and blessed the tears that fell upon his neck. “ My dearest father ! will you not speak to your child—will you not forgive her for having caused you pain ?”

“ I bless you, my child ! but I have nothing to forgive. You turn from me,—you withdraw your hand — you despise — you condemn me ; but I do not blame you, for I deserve it.”

“ Not so ! not so ! I had no such thought — do not think it. My mind was confused— it was on other things. Say that you do not doubt my love ?”

“ I dare not doubt it !” replied her father, permitting her to remove his hands and press her lips to his.

“ Then you do not hate or despise me, Florence, and will become Clanellon’s wife ?”

“ Does he know our situation — what may come ?” she demanded falteringly.

“ Alas ! that you should doubt your father’s honour ! But I may not chide, for I deserve

the doubt. Clanellon loves you : he knows all he requires—he expects no dower."

Florence was silent, and her father looked at her several moments without speaking ; but his features worked with some painful doubt—some harrowing suspicion : when he spoke, his voice was hollow.

" Listen to me, my child ! Your marriage with Clanellon will relieve my anxiety, and insure you the protection and tenderness of one who loves you : it will save me from ruin, threatened, almost irremediable. But if you shrink from the proposal — if this shuddering and questioning are because you love him not, do but say so ! I will not name his name again—he shall not stand before you. My child shall not be sacrificed for me. What were life, or fame, or riches, if I saw my Florence drooping ! I thought, before, you spoke in maiden bashfulness :—was it so ? Speak openly, your fate is in your own hands."

Florence shrunk with horror from a union

with Clanellon : but could she see her father's agony unmoved ?—his eye fixed on her, seeking to read his destiny, and yet refuse ?

“ If I said I did not love him——” she faltered out.

Her father's features became so fearfully convulsed that she softened her expression.

“ If I sought delay—time to know more—less hurry—might we not hope that hereafter——”

“ Hope nothing ! I have not the means to pay his debt and go on ; but I will bear all,” interrupted her father with a calmness so unnatural that his child was terrified.

“ Would he not wait ? Would not time——”

“ No ! The aid of those he can influence is my only chance. I have not told you all our difficulties :—there is no choice save Clanellon or ruin. Your choice is made, or you would not question thus. Well, be it so ! My promise must be broken. No matter :—I was mistaken, and must pay the penalty. The bond

must be redeemed. I spoke foolishly when I talked of your becoming a beggar: your mother's settlement is yours—none can touch that. I will write to Clanellon—he shall not trouble you further. Kiss me, my child!—you will love my memory, though others curse it. May another make you happy, watch over and protect you, as your father would have done!—I shall not see it; but a parent's blessing rest upon him as he acts towards you!—One more kiss, Florence! Your lips are cold, my child, but not your heart;—you will love me still when I am gone, though I have brought you woe and shame. Heaven bless my child!"

" My father! what mean you — whither would you go?" she inquired in alarm, clinging to him lest he should put her from him.

" I know not what I mean—whither I would go:—I only feel that I cannot bear to look upon the child whom I have ruined—that I must fly from those whom I have injured. Let me go, Florence!" but she clung the more closely to him.

The flushed cheek and the gleaming eye were gone, and he was a pale, heartbroken man : his voice too was low and plaintive.

She could doubt—she could pause no longer. He would sacrifice all for her, and would she make no sacrifice for him ? He whom she had loved was the affianced husband of another—she should not destroy his happiness. Why then should she hesitate ? Why not seek in the devotion of a child—her father's fondness—to forget a misplaced affection ? She could not give Clanellon a wife's love, but she would seek to perform a wife's duties.

“ Let me go, my child !”

“ No ! we will live and die together. You shall not go—you shall not leave me. I am yours, my father : do with me as you will. Send for him—I will see him. I will be his, if he should wish it.”

“ Will you, my child ? A thousand blessings on your head ! You love Clanellon ?” he demanded less joyfully.

She was silent.

“ Speak, Florence ! I cannot bear this suspense ! You shall make no sacrifice for me.”

Florence checked the sigh that came unbidden at his words. The sacrifice must be complete: he must believe it no sacrifice—he must see no tear—he must hear no murmur.

“ I will speak, my father ; and you must believe your child, for she speaks the truth. I may not feel towards Lord Clanellon all that I have fancied love to be ; but there is no other whom I wish to wed.”

“ I am satisfied,” said her father after looking at her steadily. “ That blush may be the blush of bashfulness—it is not that of untruth. I may yet redeem our fortunes—yet see my child a happy wife. And this will be your doing : to you I shall owe all !”

Before Florence received her father’s parting kiss and benediction, she was fully pledged to meet Clanellon on the morrow as her future husband, should he still desire it after an ex-

planation of her feelings. Her father smiled at the stipulation, now thoroughly convinced that her former hesitation had been merely the effect of a too sensitive delicacy. Mr. Lyle, it has been shown, was not troubled with too much penetration, and was always inclined to believe what he desired: thus he retired to rest blessed in the belief that Clanellon would be his son-in-law, Florence as happy as he wished her, and his mercantile difficulties overcome, through his lordship's means. The gloomy thoughts that had haunted him disappeared: though still shocked at his loss, he hoped to repair it, and his sleep was visited by happy dreams.

Not so poor Florence! Her word was pledged, and she would keep it. She would strive to fulfil the duties she had promised to undertake—she would teach her lips to smile—she would look on her father with a tearless eye; but there was no hope of earthly happiness for her. She knew Clanellon—her opinion

of him could undergo no change: she believed him utterly incapable of any exalted virtue, though well able to assume its semblance. Yet was there one thing against such a belief,—the still seeking a union with her. That, piqued by her coldness, he would rejoice to make her feel his power—nay, that he possibly entertained a feeling for her which he might dignify by the name of love, she could understand; but that he should pay seventy thousand pounds for her father out of pure affection for herself, and that he should still seek her hand when aware that her mother's settlement would probably be all her fortune, was what she could neither comprehend nor fully credit. There was a generosity—a romance in this not in accordance with what she imagined to be his real character. Either she had wronged him in her judgment—which she could not believe, or there were some points of this gambling transaction which would ill bear the light; or he was firmly convinced that her father's embarrass-

ment was but temporary, and that she would still be the heiress of considerable wealth.

She questioned her father as closely as she could without again exciting his suspicion of her extreme repugnance to the match ; but she learnt nothing more. Hislop was evidently little known or liked by Clanellon ; had only been invited on account of business, something about a piece of land to be bought or sold ; and Clanellon had spoken of him in terms of strong condemnation. Shaw appeared a perfect stranger to both. There was nothing to confirm her suspicions, and yet she still held them. She dreaded the approaching interview ; but it must be. She could scarcely hope to turn him from the union on which, it appeared, from some cause or other, he had set his mind ; but she would search and question, hopeless as both seemed. It was her only chance, and poor as it was, she could not quite relinquish it. She listened in silence to her father's praises of his generosity, delicacy, and

love: in the same silence, she submitted to old nurse's prescription, only insisting on her not sitting by her; and, thanks to that prescription, soon fell into a heavy slumber, little refreshing, but still far preferable to her waking thoughts.

CHAPTER III.

“ Mais le droit ?”

“ Le droit ! C'est la force.”

LE VICOMTE D'ARLINCOURT.

THE next morning saw Mr. Lyle more like the Mr. Lyle of former days : but few traces remained of his fears and sufferings. The possibilities of the preceding evening he now regarded as certainties : his child would be a happy wife, and by Clanellon's aid he should withstand all shocks upon his credit as a merchant. His look was less elated as he marked his daughter's pallid cheeks and leaden eye ; but as she smiled upon him when she met his glance, and the cheek flushed as he named Clanellon, he felt no alarm.

“ Shall I detain Clanellon till I return, or will you admit him before ?” he asked as he was leaving the room to go to Fairport. “ I know he will be impatient ; so if your headache is not very violent——”

“ It might seem more gracious to admit him at once, you would say. So let it be then ; but you will make him understand that he is not positively accepted.”

“ Of course not,—he must woo before he can win,” replied her father, smiling at the wording of her concession, her faltering voice, and downcast look.

For once Mr. Lyle was right : Clanellon was impatient. A horse ready saddled was leading up and down before the hotel, and his lordship was looking from the window.

“ Your daughter is well, I hope ?” said the expecting lover, meeting the father on the stairs with an anxiety highly pleasing.

Within a quarter of an hour, the viscount was galloping towards Atherton Hall.

Florence rose as his lordship entered the library, but took no step in advance, and her hand rested on the back of a chair for support ; but, as her visitor inquired for her health with an interest too warm to be feigned—too delicate to offend, she mastered her emotion and replied to his questions with tolerable composure.

Clanellon's interest was not feigned—he did love Florence Lyle, and he could not but feel compassion as his quick eye marked the traces of her late painful struggle. Had she met him with her usual cold and chilling demeanour, he might have shown less feeling ; but her evident emotion touched him. Though her greeting, considering him as a lover, was cold and languid, it was not studied. The sufferings of many days—the struggle of the preceding one—the throbbing of her temples, forbade a settled plan of action : she was equal to no more than trying to control her agitation, and acting from the impulse given by his words and manner.

The cold hand he had taken, without being absolutely withdrawn, shrunk from his touch ; and as he took a seat beside her, she turned away with a slight shudder. He had the feeling and delicacy to converse for some time on indifferent topics, yet showing that it was for her pleasure, not for his, that he did so. The lover's hopes were still apparent, but subdued to the tone of her spirits. She felt the delicacy, and was grateful, though not quite as much so as he desired, since she considered him the most exquisite of actors ; but before he entered on the real object of his visit her feelings were sufficiently under rule to enable her to listen to his pleading without a burst of emotion. She could not maintain her former calm superiority, for the cheek flushed and faded, and the voice faltered against her will ; but she was sufficiently composed to note his looks — to mark the variations of his tone.

“ My mother is now restored to her usual state of health,” he replied to one of the polite

questions which she compelled herself to ask. “She is always delicate, but I never before endured the pain of believing her in danger. When the heart suffers most, it is most moved by the tears of sympathy; and your kind wishes for her health when I was so suddenly called away left an impression which no time can efface. They were with me when I sat by her side, watching her flushed cheek, holding her burning hand in mine: they ever sounded softly in my ears, bringing with them hopes of her recovery. You do not know my mother yet; but she has learned from me to prize you. May I hope to present you to her as her on whom my love is placed—to whom my life shall henceforth be devoted? That you would permit me to claim her congratulations! to present you to her as a daughter! to demand for you a daughter’s blessing!”

The long dark eyelashes of his listener rested on her crimson cheek: she neither moved nor spoke; and he continued,—

“ I fear I plead my cause but poorly :—the deeper, the stronger the feeling, the less able the tongue to reveal it. I was restless and impatient, till, with your father’s sanction, I could press my suit ; and now I stand before you trembling and speechless. The words die on my lips, for they are too poor to speak my thoughts :—I am timid because sensible of the inestimable value of that for which I plead. Your father gave me hopes that you would not quite disdain the love I offer. Miss Lyle ! Florence—dear Florence ! may I not hope ?”

Florence withdrew the hand he would have taken, answering with a calmness and dignity which he had not expected. He saw it was assumed—maintained with difficulty : he saw by the glancing of her dark eye, as she looked upon him, that she was not subdued—that she was not quite resigned to her fate—that some hope of avoiding it lingered still. His lip did not curl, though he inwardly mocked at the thought : “ Florence Lyle should be his !”

“ I am aware, Lord Clanellon, of the hope which my father has sanctioned; but your penetration cannot have failed to discover that it is his nature—I might say, his happiness, in most things, to see all as he wishes. You see all, or nearly all, as it is ; yet there are circumstances which I feel myself called on to explain. Are you fully aware that you make an offer of your hand to one who within a week may be a bankrupt’s daughter, with no fortune but her mother’s settlement, which she will never look upon as hers so long as one of her father’s creditors remains unsatisfied? I speak strongly and openly on this point :—there should be no deception between us.”

“ I admire your candour—it is worthy of you !” he replied without shrinking from her searching look. “ Your father was too high-minded not to give me as clear a statement of his affairs; but I hope, through the aid of the houses I can influence, that he may yet escape the misfortune to which you allude ; though a

competence, as compared with his former immense wealth, is, I fear, all he can anticipate for the future. I am sorry it is not in my power to aid as I would ; but I have to grieve for sums lavished on worthless objects in my earlier days: and grieving, though it may save from future error, cannot retrieve the past."

He looked down as he spoke in becoming confusion. One who loved would have been moved, and would have hastened to reassure him ; but Florence did not love, and was silent. He proceeded more earnestly—

“ If you only offered this explanation as considering it due to yourself, I admire the lofty feeling on which you acted ; but if you for one instant thought it could make me pause or urge my suit less warmly, you did me wrong. I have many faults ; I do not seek to palliate them : you have perceived them, and, I fear, once judged them a little harshly. Under your gentle influence I hope for their amendment ; but, however erring I may be,

do not, I implore you, doubt my love ! Let your father's embarrassments end as they may, my affection will be unchilled — my hopes unchanged ! You do not—you cannot doubt my regard ?”

She could not doubt its strength at the present moment, but she still doubted its disinterestedness.

“ Your pardon, my lord, if my words appear ungracious ; but I repeat, there should be no deception — no concealment between us. Do you remember how a paragraph in the paper had power to move you at our first meeting ?”

“ I do : and I remember the whole of that meeting with shame. I have no other excuse but what may itself be considered inexcusable —I was out of temper. I came to Atherton by my father's will, against my own, leaving town in the height of the season. I neither knew you nor your kind father—I chose to be the slave of prejudice ; my welcome, not flattering, owing to my own mistake, I construed

into a purposed insult ; and I was more wrathful than I should have been at a report which had too little truth for its foundation to deserve the power of annoying,—but it is not pleasant to be held up to all the world as an object for ridicule or blame. Will you neither forgive nor forget an error which I hope has been atoned for by my subsequent regret—by many a painful doubt, lest its remembrance should steel your heart against me ? You cannot but believe that my sentiments now towards Mr. Lyle are all his daughter can require—that I feel for him a regard little short of her own."

" I asked for no apology, at this distance of time," she said a little proudly. " I only wished you to consider how, if my wealth was an inducement then—as you will scarcely deny that it was—its loss is not thought of now. I marked more than once that allusions to poverty and gambling had the power to move you."

Clanellon bit his lip ; but his words betokened no greater indignation than was allowable.

“ That Miss Lyle is no merciful judge, I feel to my pain, though I had hoped from her father's report to have met with more favour. If I apologise for one fault, it only leads to a demand for the confession of another :—I am grieved at the doubts such conduct implies, but will answer openly. I had been extravagant—I had embarrassed my father, and self-reproach barbed the taunts of malice. I have confessed —may I not now hope for pardon ?”

She turned away with a troubled and clouded look.

“ Would you ask more ? Heed not my pain ! I am at your mercy ; for he who truly loves can feel no resentment.”

A doubtful smile curled her lip. “ I would cause you no needless pain, my lord, but I am peculiarly situated :—I am urged on to that from which I shrink :—I would be spared if I might. My father speaks highly of your generosity and kindness in a late transaction. Embarrassed, as you admit yourself to have

been, that generosity, if arising from uncalculating friendship, is worthy of the highest praise: but I do not see how a union with one of little fortune can remove your embarrassment, or be a fitting reward for such noble disinterestedness."

She fancied she could discern a little consciousness in his look — a slight accession of colour to his cheek; but there was no other circumstance to warrant her suspicions. Her words were not flattering, and he might well be annoyed without being guilty.

" I begged you to question, if you wished it, and must not complain if you use your power a little hardly. The embarrassment of those with large landed property is seldom more than temporary: the sale of an estate released me from all demands—my uncle's legacy made me rich. These doubts of my sincerity are cruel and unjust. I may not at the present moment be able to offer you a splendid income; but how often have I heard you say that wealth bought

not happiness ! The pecuniary arrangements I have proposed to your father have met his approbation ; and Miss Lyle is not one to bargain for additional thousands to her settlement. If I have less than I desire to lay at the feet of the daughter, it is because I could not see her father's agony unmoved."

Florence coloured. If her suspicions were unjust, his rebuke was more than merited. She did not interrupt him, however, and he continued—

" For Mr. Lyle's unexpected loss I am more grieved than I can express, holding myself as in some sort the unhappy though innocent cause of the misfortune. Had your father not met Hislop at my house, it might not have occurred : yet surely even my greatest enemy could not hold me accountable for the consequences. Mr. Hislop had been invited to dinner before I saw Mr. Lyle, that being the only time he would appoint for concluding some business of the earl's, and my cousin's impatient

summons obliged me to leave them together; but little did I imagine that your father could be tempted to the gaming-table. Returning late from my relatives, I saw Mr. Lyle near my own house, leaning against the rails, evidently in pain, mental or bodily. I insisted on his going home with me, for I dared not leave him to himself, and persuaded him to seek repose. Seventy thousand pounds was a large sum to lose, and at one sitting! The run of luck against him must have been very great, if all had been fair. I made many inquiries whilst he slept, but the result was not to my wishes: my suspicions were unfounded. Mr. Shaw's character was unimpeachable; he was a perfect stranger to Hislop; the luck had been extraordinary—the play honourable—the lookers-on averred—Mr. Lyle unskilled. I could not bear to look upon your father's suffering:—what it was, you may judge in some slight degree from what you saw last night. I had learned to regard him as a parent—the debt

was paid, and I was rewarded by his gratitude. I will not say that my love for the daughter may not have influenced my conduct towards the father; — what human act may not be charged with some imperfection? Mr. Lyle knew and sanctioned my love — he had given me reason to hope it was returned — he would only receive the money from myself, and the assistance which I could obtain through others, as from his future son-in-law. If you rejected me, he should consider himself my debtor, and he must bear his ruin as he could. May I not be pardoned if I urged for liberty to press my suit at once? With such a hope, could I be cold or careless? Will you blame me that I acted thus?"

" You have entered on a defence, my lord, before a charge was made. I did not say that Mr. Hislop was your agent, or Mr. Shaw your tool: — I did not say the play had been unfair."

Clanellon met her keen look with an innocent, a triumphant boldness; and she saw at

once, that if deception had been used, it was beyond her skill to make it manifest. His bonds were on her, and she must submit.

“ You made no such charge in direct words, I admit ; but could I doubt that you thought it, from the terms in which you spoke of the service which it was happily in my power to render to your father ? ” he demanded without attempting to conceal his mortification. “ Let your own heart acquit or condemn me of over-forwardness in my defence. Love cannot be deceived—it is too sensitively alive to every variation not to read the depths of the heart on which its hopes are placed.”

Poor Florence ! she had but one more chance of escape—hope it could not be called : if an open avowal of her dislike would not turn him from his purpose, she must yield to his threat of withholding his assistance from her father unless received as his son-in-law ; for a threat she had felt it to be, though delicately conveyed.

" You say truly, my lord—love cannot be deceived," she replied, speaking less calmly. " Thus, if your love is indeed sincere, you must have seen that it is not—that it cannot be returned."

" Do not tell me this, Miss Lyle. I can bear your reproaches—I can submit to your suspicions—but I cannot endure those dreadful words. I will not believe them: you are but trying my affection. At first I saw you regarded me with coldness; but lately I have indulged in hopes—the strongest hopes, of having created the interest I so earnestly desired. That hope has been confirmed by your father. He bade me consider your former coldness as but assumed—he stands pledged for your love—he promised me your hand—though warning me that you would not be lightly won. If I have been too presumptuous, pardon me! Do we not strongly hope that which we ardently desire? Blame if it so please you—but do not scorn my suit! Ratify your father's pledges—confide

your future happiness to me ;—it shall be watched over with the untiring zeal of true affection.”

“ Hear me, Lord Clanellon. My father was deceived himself ; but he has not misled another. You cannot be deceived : you knew my sentiments before I stated them ; and I have but to add—they are unalterable ! I put it to you as a mere question of prudence —What happiness can you expect in a union with one who openly avows her indifference, and more than hints her doubts of your honour and disinterestedness ?”

He showed no change, little vexation, and she prepared to make one desperate appeal.

“ I put it to you as a man of honour and of feeling, whether you will force a feeble woman to that from which she shrinks with horror ! I throw myself on your generosity ;—it is now for you to convict me of having judged you harshly. You may compel me to your wishes by withholding your friend’s aid—by claiming

the payment of the bond—nay, you may do it with more seeming delicacy, yet with equal cruelty, by departing in anger, saying that I decline your offer. In either case my father would be deprived of your aid: you alone can reconcile him to the disappointment—you alone can induce him to depend on you. If you claim your bond or claim your bride, I must submit, for I cannot bear my father's agony. I dare not tell the truth, or he would not accept the sacrifice. Persuade him as you can persuade, and doubt not that a little time hence your bond shall be redeemed. If needs be, I too will slave even to the death, labouring night and day till all shall be repaid. Surely the blessing of the grateful will be better than an unwilling bride pining away before your eyes. I do not—I never can love you! The duty of a wife is all that you can obtain—her affectionate sympathy never can be yours! I am at your mercy!—it is you alone can save me from what I dread. Spare me!"

and she laid her hand gently on his arm ; “ be generous ! spare me ! and the prayers and the blessings of a grateful heart will rest upon you !”

He could not listen to her passionate pleading for his pity—could not meet the look of her dark eyes swimming in tears, and not be touched : his strong frame shook beneath the light touch of her slender fingers, and he was silent before her. It seemed as though his good angel was making a last effort for his preservation, by offering to his choice one noble act that might in part repair the past :—that the spirits of good and evil were holding a mighty contest for his soul, and that his choice would decide his fate, so wild and troubled were his looks. Florence gathered hope.

“ You pity — you will spare me ! I shall bless you !”

• He threw off the gentle pressure on his arm, turned suddenly away from that earnest look, and walked to the window. Florence did not

move, but her pleading eyes rested upon him still. The struggle was past—Clanellon again approached the sofa.

Those earnest eyes were raised to his—he turned away, and Florence knew that her fate was sealed. But he did not speak her doom in harshness or in triumph: his voice faltered, and its tone was gentle.

“ Do not think me ungenerous, Florence, but I cannot yield you ! I love you—as I never loved before !”

“ Then you doom me to a life of misery !” said Florence with the calmness of despair.

“ Not so ! my devotion will yet win your love.”

“ Hope it not ! it cannot be !”

“ It must—it shall be !” he continued more vehemently, hurt at her coldness. “ I shall in time be first in your regard : I have no rival—you love no other now.”

Those pleading eyes were bent on the ground, and the pale cheek flushed, faded, and flushed

again. Had Clanellon thirsted for revenge for all her slights, it was his :—here was more than enough to satiate its raging ! She felt that his gaze was fixed upon her—a strange mingling of love, and wrath, and triumph ; she felt that look piercing as it were her eyeballs—her face was bowed before him — the spirit seemed so crushed that it could never rise again. Yet it was not so : the warfare was over—she would brave his insolence, she would command his respect, though her heart broke with the torture and the shame. She looked up ; her eye met Clanellon's in the boldness of innocence, who stepped back involuntarily, so lofty was her mien, though the lips were livid and the face fearfully pale.

“ Lord Clanellon, this cannot be !” she said in an elevated tone ; “ you cannot win my love ! I have appealed to your generosity in vain :—you have proved my judgment not too harsh. Without honour—without principle—without one generous feeling, I should despise,

but that I fear you. The feeble is in your power, and you trample on her. May God forgive you in the last day, as I forgive you now! but it will be a fearful charge against you. You say you have no rival:—you say truly. You say I love no other:—you shall not have the right in after days to taunt me with concealment—to charge me with deceit—though, if I left your words unanswered, you would not be deceived. I do love another, Lord Clanellon! Let the shame of the avowal rest with him who wrings it from me. It is not only indifference to which you would unite yourself."

Clanellon was amazed and abashed: he had not imagined such a painful confession possible—he could not but feel the contrast between himself and her. He would not yield—he would not change; but he felt that his victory was a defeat—his triumph shame!

" You have said I have no rival; and I will trust to your strict ideas of a wife's duty. Your preference for another will not withstand the

unwearying assiduities of a devoted heart. He you love is——”

He paused, for he saw her brow contract—her hands fell by her side as she gasped for breath; but the next moment she resumed her lofty bearing, and took up his words with a command that awed.

“ He is the affianced husband of another!—Count not on this!” she added, remarking his start of joyous triumph. “ I must forget, but you will still be regarded with coldness and distrust. I cannot rely on you—I dare not believe you! You may claim my hand;—my love you cannot win—I cannot give.”

“ I do claim your hand,” he exclaimed with vehement eagerness, grasping the cold fingers firmly,—“ I do claim your hand!—and you pledge yourself to yield it to me at the altar, let what may occur?”

“ Can you—will you dare to demand it?” she asked with a sternness that might have appalled one less resolved.

“ I can—I dare ! Will you pledge yourself to yield it to me ?”

She did not speak—she seemed turned to stone, every feature fixed in silent agony : Clanellon was alarmed.

“ Florence—dear Florence, speak ! Do not look thus ! Rely on my love—on my devotion !”

She shuddered and turned away at his endearing words. He saw her disgust and spoke more sternly.

“ Florence, for your father's sake, do you pledge me this hand whenever I may claim it ?”

The hand stiffened in his grasp — the livid lips parted with a low murmured sound of pain — the fatal ‘ yes ’ that must seal her misery was half gasped forth, when its utterance was arrested by the downfall of a folding screen at the other end of the apartment, and the sudden standing forth of Lord Dunrayne in a still more wrathful mood than that in which he had once before broken in upon their *tête-à-tête*.

“ I wish you would have your screens made to stand firmer,” said his lordship, stepping forward from behind its fallen folds, and approaching Florence with an outstretched hand, whilst he bestowed on her companion such a look of scorn that Clanellon’s cheek crimsoned and his eye flashed fiercely. Dunrayne heeded neither, but, turning his back upon him, stood between him and his victim.

“ Dunrayne!” exclaimed Florence in surprise, confused by his sudden presence and not recovered from her recent agitation ; “ I thought you were abroad.”

“ I am—all abroad, as one may say, and can retort the compliment,” he replied in bitter jesting ; then, softened by her look of pain, he spoke more gently. “ I have a message to deliver to you from Emma, but it must be given in private ; so come with me,” drawing her arm within his. “ I must speak to you alone, and there is no time to lose.”

Florence looked from one to the other, and

was convinced of the prudence of an instant separation between two such fiery spirits excited by no friendly feelings.

“Stay one moment — only one moment, Florence!” said Clanellon, advancing hastily as she was leaving the room with her new visitor.

“Miss Lyle cannot be delayed,” interrupted Dunrayne fiercely.

“My appeal was made to Miss Lyle herself, and she will not refuse it,” replied Clanellon with answering fierceness.

Florence stopped, but involuntarily clung to Dunrayne.

“I tell you, Miss Lyle cannot be delayed,” said Dunrayne in increasing wrath, feeling her trembling pressure on his arm.

“I would but pour forth my thanks — my lasting gratitude for the promise which has confirmed my happiness;” taking her cold hand, and speaking in the tone that would well befit a lover thanking his lady love in the

presence of another for the granting of his suit.

It was a stroke of policy thus to show that he considered the suit as granted—the promise as pronounced.

“ It will be time to render thanks when the promise has been made,” replied Dunrayne with a scornful laugh. “ Now leave the lady to my care—my sister’s message is not for all. In one short hour you may repeat the prettinesses invented in the interim ;” and without leaving Clanellon time to reply to his open insolence, he led Florence from the room, closing the door behind them with a startling violence.

She offered no opposition, and Dunrayne led her in silence into the inner saloon, shutting only the door of the outer one, and looking behind a beautiful Indian screen, thus securing himself from being overheard. Of the convenience of a screen for listeners, he could speak from experience. This done, he approached

Florence, who had allowed him to lead her to a seat in silence, and kneeling before her, took both her hands in his, looking into her bowed face as he spoke.

“ Florence, you shall not marry that man—not whilst I have life ! Promise me that you will not !”

Florence shook from head to foot.

“ I must !” she said, speaking with difficulty : then looking up, she added earnestly, “ Do not you increase my misery by your violence.”

Dunrayne was softened. She had not recovered from her late struggle ; he had never seen her so feeble—so subdued.

“ I will be calm, Florence—kind and gentle as a loving brother. Only make no promise to that man, and I will save you.”

“ Will you ! Oh, do not deceive me !” looking wildly at him.

“ I will not deceive you ; but you must make no promise.”

“ No, no ! I will make no promise !—I did make no promise, did I ?”

“ None ! You had not said yes !”

She looked doubtingly in his face ; then, remembering all that had passed, shook her head and spoke with a mournful resignation which shocked her companion.

“ Leave me, Dunrayne ; it is too late ! If I made no promise, I said I would—and, alas ! I must. Ask me not why—I have no choice.”

“ No, Florence, you must not !—you would not give your hand through love ?”

“ No, no !”

“ Then you shall not give it him through fear. Your father shall be saved by other means.”

“ My father !—then you know ? For Heaven's sake, be cautious !—think how a hint might cause his ruin.”

“ Never fear my being cautious when those you love are concerned : your father need fear no words of mine.”

“ I trust not: but from whom did you hear it? Should others know it too !”

“ Psha, Florence! You have not your usual wit. No one else knows it !”

“ How then ?”—he interrupted her impatiently.

“ You are wasting time in idle questions.”

“ Is it possible that you could, Dunrayne ?”

“ Few things are impossible to the zealous !” he replied, again interrupting her between jest and earnest, shame and justification. “ It is not civil to disturb a *tête-à-tête* unless absolutely compelled: besides, the deceitful must be foiled with their own weapons;—no profit in bold open fighting against the insidious poisoner. I have heard of Shaw, and, I think, Hislop—the more to my shame—and I know a friend who may aid you as efficiently and more sincerely than Clanellon.”

“ Then you really have been listening? How much of our conversation did you overhear? I will be answered,” she added firmly,

seeing his hesitation, though her pale cheek crimsoned as she spoke.

“All!” he said after a moment’s pause, turning away as he replied, to spare her or himself.

“All!” she repeated wildly. “Was I not humiliated enough before? Must I be the mock—the jest of all? Was this honourable?”

She hid her face in the hands which, in the interest of their conversation, she had hitherto allowed him to retain. He was hurt at her manner—vexed at her words.

“Honourable, Florence? Nonsense! In times of peril,

‘Nice tourney rules are set aside.’

Deceivers must be watched—ay, and deceived too if requisite. It is not for you to feel humiliated—the humiliation rests with him who would compel your will; and I never felt the loftiness of virtue so truly as at that moment—he was as a noisome worm before a being pure and holy. Shall such wound you—win you?

Never! Hear me. I go to thwart his plots—to cross his hopes: all I ask of you is one month's delay,—a shorter time for preparation would be scarcely decent, however he might press for speed,—and the liberty to free yourself from the engagement at the last moment—even, if required, at the altar's foot, should you obtain proof of his deception or means to pay the bond. Will you not promise this?"

"I would first ask by what means you hope to free me. Your late conduct—"

"Never mind my late conduct—I have no time for a lecture on morals. I pledge myself to do nothing but what, were Emma as you are, you should approve and counsel. Will that suffice?"

Florence was in no mood to enter on an argument of morals, and too wretched not to catch at any hope, however desperate, that should save her from Clanellon; so she declared herself contented, though still wishing to be informed of the means which he intended to employ.

“Leave the means to me. Women are never curious!—Now do you give me the promise?”

“Most readily.”

“Then I have no doubt of success; knowing that you will neither be wheedled nor frightened into breaking your word. The villain shall be foiled, and Dunrayne triumph and be blessed! Farewell, dear Florence! I must be greeted by your brightest smiles when I return.”

He pressed her hands to his lips, and turned to leave her.

“Dunrayne!”

He returned and stood before her, waiting her commands.

“What would you, Florence?” he demanded, finding that she neither spoke nor raised her eyes.

“I would not have you deceive yourself,” she replied in low and faltering accents that gathered strength as she proceeded. “Your words—your manner—tell of hopes which cannot be fulfilled. You said you would be to

me as a kind brother—you must seek to be no more. If you heard all, you should know that more you cannot be."

" Why not, Florence ?" he demanded with hurried vehemence,—" why not ? You would have given your hand to Clanellon, and I at least shall deserve your gratitude."

" Lord Clanellon would compel me to be his by ungenerous threats ; and would Lord Dunrayne do the like ? Would he free me from one bondage only to enslave me to another ? Would he force an unwilling heart—would he claim a reluctant hand ? Can he not do a noble deed, but he must stain its worth by an outrage on a broken spirit ?"

He turned away from her appeal ; and, as in Clanellon, the good and evil spirit seemed struggling for dominion.

" But since there is a cloud upon your hopes, may not time—may not the devotion of the whole heart win love for its love ?" he asked, but without meeting her reproving eye.

“ Just so said Lord Clanellon ; yet you called him a villain !”

Dunrayne started, and paced the room with no mincing steps.

“ Is it Walter Gordon who has crossed me thus ?” he demanded in a hoarse voice, stopping abruptly before the object of his love.

“ Why would you ask ?” replied the trembling Florence.

Dunrayne gave no other answer than a muttered oath ; and she watched the varying expression of his features with increasing anxiety.

“ What do you fear, Florence ?” he said abruptly, appearing then first aware that she was watching him. “ I intend no harm to any.”

“ And I may look on Dunrayne now and ever as a kind brother ?” she said doubtfully.

“ I shall compel nothing further ; but if gratitude should win me more hereafter, I shall accept it joyfully.”

“ Gratitude is all I can ever give—you must

not serve me with the hope of more," she said impressively.

"All now — that is natural; but hereafter, when—" He stopped, for Florence turned away in silent anguish.

He was speaking of that as a subject of hope to himself which was to consummate her sorrow, and his heart rebuked him for his cruelty.

"Good b'ye, Florence! grieve not — you shall see or hear from me soon."

A low farewell was her only answer, and Dunrayne strode towards the door, but, before he departed, turned to take one parting look. Nor was that but momentary: he doubted—wavered; the warfare between his good and evil spirit—between generosity and selfishness, was renewed. She turned towards him — a moment after he had rushed to her side. He could not bear the touching sadness of that look—his better feelings triumphed; yet he could not resolve to be wholly generous,—to tell her that she was loved —to yield her to another.

"Florence, look up! there is no cause for grief—Gordon is not affianced to another! No matter how I know this," answering her inquiring look; "it is no time for questions. But I cannot yield you to him! You must—you shall be mine! I will win you yet."

For an instant his arm was round her; then, before she could resent the rudeness—a rudeness never ventured on even in their days of childhood, he had rushed from the room and quitted the house, leaving her trembling and flushed,—shocked, indignant, blaming, and admiring, all at once.

The torpor of despair was gone—hope had again awakened her to action. It was a vague, an anxious hope—still it was hope, and she blessed it, anxious as it was.

She was an altered person when she again met Clanellon: he saw the difference at a glance, but gave no sign of such a knowledge. He played the delicate yet tender lover to perfection, even after she had clearly stated that

their engagement was not to be considered binding if at any time before the performance of the ceremony she could find means to pay the debt he had cancelled for her father. He remonstrated strongly, asserting that he considered her unconditional promise to have been given ; but finding her unmoved by his remonstrances —unchanged in her resolve—even after the hint of an appeal to her father, he yielded the point, and with so good a grace, that none could have guessed the extent of his vexation.

His pleadings to Mr. Lyle for an immediate union on the plea of expediency, lest any unforeseen occurrence should hurry on the failure which they hoped to avert, were equally fruitless. They were powerless, as being contrary to his child's wishes ; and again was Clanellon compelled to yield with gracefulness, contenting himself with the inward resolution of future compensation. Six weeks was the shortest delay he could obtain ; and even this seemed likely to be prolonged by the dangerous ill-

ness of his mother, to whom he was again summoned within a week after his arrival, to the great delight of Florence, to whom his presence caused shame and fear ;—shame at her confession, and the courtesy she was compelled to show him in her father's presence, lest he should perceive her aversion ; and fear, lest Dunrayne should fail, and she be forced to become his bride.

No wonder that his absence was felt as a relief.

CHAPTER IV.

Montague. My lord, I do arrest you for high treason.

Berners. Where is your warrant?

Mon. It shall be shown anon.

Ber. And who shall witness 'gainst me?

Mon. Even yourself!

The modes of the court so common are grown,
That a true friend is scarce to be met
Friendship, like interest, is but a loan,
Which they let out for what they can get.

Song.

IT was night—a dark, tempestuous night. But what mattered the hurrying clouds or the whistling wind to those assembled in a brilliantly lighted and crowded saloon in one of the best streets in Paris? The stir of passions within forbade all note of the stir of elements without. What is the aspect of Nature to the confirmed

and anxious gambler?—and all within that saloon were gamblers, or the observers of gamblers.

Many spectators were crowded round one table, where the extraordinary luck of an individual, joined to his equally extraordinary skill, had attracted much observation. There was nothing striking in the appearance of the winner; unless an unruffled calmness and self-possession, and a keen and occasional glancing of eyes that seemed to shun a steady look, could be so considered.

His observers were moved by different feelings: some regarded him with wonder and admiration; others with doubt, dislike, or envy. Those who won through his success applauded his skill, whilst those who lost through the same cause exclaimed at his luck. There was one who observed him more acutely than any—whose eye was never off him, though he made no remark, and veiled his scrutiny under a show of carelessness. The features of most of

the other observers showed the ravages of time, anxiety, or fiery passions. They appeared to require strong excitement either to quicken the sated taste, to hush remorse, or stifle thought.

Not so this one ! His graceful figure was unbent by age—his features as yet unstamped with the strong lines of time or passion. Dissect his countenance—examine every feature separately, and sculptors and painters might have decided none were perfect : but take the countenance in the whole—submit to the instantaneous impression it made upon the mind, and all must own the power of its beauty—not merely physical, but moral and intellectual. The timid and the gentle felt assured and safe—the proud owned an equal and were courteous—the virtuous acknowledged a kindred virtue—the lofty genius, the elevated mind, checked not their bursts of eloquence, those rushing streams of thought, secure of sympathy, shocked by no stare of wonder—no common-place of praise.

And what could such an one do there? Was he whose mind was a precious and unwrought mine of thought, and filled with images of brighter things than earth contains,—was he mingling with the sated and the silly, the wicked and his dupe, to do the like, and for a momentary excitement, painful or pleasant—no matter so it was excitement—palter away those talents of whose employment he must give account? Or was he there to mock mankind—to jest at their folly or their guilt, and marvel how the lips can talk of wisdom and of goodness, and yet the heart consent to sin—the hand act folly? or to wonder at the grown-up man, who moralises on the child's eagerness for present good without one thought himself for far futurity? Or was he there to warn, to counsel, or to save?

He was not there to win wealth or forgetfulness: he neither played nor betted, though invited to do both. Occasionally a cloud obscured the brightness of his countenance, but

it passed on the instant: his sorrow, be it what it might, had been subdued by holier means. His hopes were such as could bring no blush upon his cheek. He might seek to detect the dishonourable or preserve the innocent, but he would not partake of such unholy spoils.

Look at him now! There is triumph in his dark eye—a brilliant triumph—some hope has been fulfilled!—he has met the glance of the winner, whose look is down and dark, though the glittering gold is swept towards him, and his hand is on the prize, and none say him nay. Cannot wealth bring peace, and joy, and balm the conscience? Ask those who seek for wealth as an end, and not a means,—or a means for vanity or evil. It may come to such, but its possession brings no blessing with it—no thankfulness, and no content. The heart still pines—is still unsatisfied, amid its glittering abundance. It goes, and its loss brings despair! The heart had made no friends—had gained no treasure with its golden store; it had

not won the blessings of the poor, the prayers of the fatherless, the broken thanks of the widow; it had laid up no store of gratitude to Heaven—it had wasted its abundance in folly or in vice. Riches came, and they are gone again! and the heart has no blessed memorial of the departed treasure wherewith to soothe its sorrow.

The winner has secured his gains—has declined to play again, and is descending the stairs, and the observing stranger is following at a little distance,—not as if following him, but as if their paths chanced to lead in the same direction. His look of triumph and of hope is become less joyous—it is troubled: he will pursue his object; but the first joyous feeling past, he is made aware that sorrow must mingle with his pleasure even should his object be attained.

Who drains the cup of earthly bliss and finds no bitter in the draught? The wind was high—so high that at times it was difficult to

stand against it ; but the rain had ceased, and drawing his cloak closely round him, the winner proceeded towards his home, still followed by the stranger. Either the winner knew nothing of the streets of Paris—or he took pleasure in the wind—or he wished to deceive or tire his pursuer, for he turned up one street and down another, ever returning, through ignorance or design, nearly to the spot from whence he had started ; yet still the stranger was not far behind. After a while, believing himself no longer watched, the winner pursued a more direct course.

He was mistaken—he was still watched, only more cautiously, for his doublings had been wearying.

The stranger had nearly reached the end of a long street round the corner of which the gamester had disappeared, when a faint cry as for help was borne towards him on the furious gust. He rushed forward, turning the corner into a dark narrow alley, and saw the winner

a few paces before him struggling with two men and calling feebly for assistance. To dash one man to the earth and tear the second from the gambler, who was on the ground choking beneath his grasp, was the work of a minute to the strength and activity of the stranger, who had rushed upon them unperceived, so intent were the robbers on their evil deed. The winner was saved for the moment, but his future safety was not secured. The man whom the stranger had seized was large and powerful, more than a match for him in strength if not in agility, and had arms which the stranger had not.

Flinging off the stranger's grasp, the ruffian drew a long knife and called on his fallen companion to rob the gambler whilst he did for the other. Happily his companion was too much stunned by his fall to comprehend or act on the call, and standing before the winner, the stranger prepared for the threatened attack. The long knife, guided by a strong arm, gleam-

ed in the moonlight. The stranger, springing aside, received the descending weapon on his cloak, and closing with the ruffian, succeeded after a violent struggle in wrenching the knife from his hands, though not without receiving a slight wound in the arm, which obliged him to loosen his grasp on the robber, who hearing the approach of others, burst from him with a sudden effort that nearly overthrew him, and seizing the arm of his companion, who was by this time tolerably recovered, darted down an obscure street and was out of sight in an instant.

The stranger lifted the gambler from the ground, who was sensible, though bleeding profusely, and explaining the affair as briefly as possible to those who approached, despatched one for a carriage to convey the wounded man to his lodgings, and others in pursuit of the robbers, of whom no traces were discovered. An eminent surgeon pronounced the wounded man to be in danger, but still held out some slight hopes of his recovery. His gratitude was

unbounded to the stranger, who watched all night by his side; and the next morning, in compliance with that stranger's wishes, a paper was dictated and signed by the sufferer in the presence of several persons with many expressions of sorrow and repentance. The stranger received it with the assurance that its possession amply repaid the risk he had incurred and the slight wound he had received.

“Should I be spared through your courage and the blessing of God, I hope to lead a better life,” said the sick man, grasping his preserver's hand. “You may command me in any way to repair the wrong I did, and may the blessing of Heaven and a clear conscience be ever with you! The wicked know no peace!”

The stranger made a kind and cheering reply, and left the sick man's room.

Those who only like sailing or steaming on a quiet sea, would have found no pleasure in occupying a place in the packet approaching Dover from the French coast not a great many

hours after the preceding conversation. In consequence of the rebellious state of the Channel, the passengers were few and nearly all of the stronger sex : even some of those were below.

“ Do you not think it a foolish idea, sir ? ” asked a respectable-looking elderly gentleman, addressing a remarkably elegant and intelligent-looking young one, who was standing forward in the vessel, with his eyes fixed on the land they were nearing, but with that vagueness in the gaze which proves “ that thought is far afield of sight.”

“ I beg your pardon, sir,—what did you say ? ” replied the young man rousing himself, and speaking with a politeness and attention that took away all idea of rudeness in his late abstraction.

“ I was appealing to you from this gentleman, whether those lightning-like perceptions, as he terms them—those sudden impulses of which some men vaunt, and on which some men act, are not silly excuses for inconsidera-

tion—the follies of over-heated and enthusiastic minds?"

"They may be so," said the young man thoughtfully;—"and yet I will by no means assert that they are. When such things come to men of usually sound judgment, I think they may be safely acted on. They must arise with such persons from the contrast or harmony of some present object with former thoughts or combinations, and might thus, I think, lead to wise decisions or valuable discoveries."

The respectable elderly gentleman opened his eyes a little wider than usual, and drew back a pace, as if high-flown ideas, as he termed those which he had just heard, were contagious.

"It is of no use appealing to you, sir: you are an enthusiast, I see."

"Almost as dangerous a character as an advocate for free trade or vote by ballot—both little short of treason," remarked the young

man, with a smile so good-humoured and animated, that his questioner took no offence, only expressing pity for his weakness.

“It is wonderful what strange opinions some persons do entertain. For my part, I like people to be sober and prudent, and go on as their fathers did before them. To my mind, enthusiasts are some of the most dangerous people in the world. Perhaps you are proud of the name and like to be so called: there is no accounting for tastes, particularly among the young.”

“I have no desire to be so called, I assure you; though I think there may be worse people in the world than enthusiasts, as many apply the term. The fact is,” continued the young man with a light laugh, “I have been called by a name so much more horrid, that I consider the one now applied to me almost an honour. I was once proclaimed as a burker! nearly hunted out of society—and had I been taken up and tried on the instant, espe-

cially had the jury been composed of ladies, I am convinced I should have been hanged on circumstantial evidence."

"Indeed, sir! very distressing!" stammered out the respectable elderly gentleman, looking askance at the speaker's arm, worn in a sling, and edging away cautiously, but politely, till arrived at a safe distance; when he whispered to a friend with many confirmatory shakings of the head.

The young man turned towards the shore with a ghastly and malicious smile, the old gentleman thought, and was one of the first to set foot on land. Another steamer was lying near, waiting only for some slight abatement of the wind, which, favourable to the one just come in, would be directly adverse to any seeking to make the coast of France. It had sailed in the morning, but had been compelled to put back with some trifling damage, and the exact time of its second departure was now doubtful. Goods and trunks were putting in or taking

out, according as their owners decided on sailing whenever it might chance, or waiting for a smoother sea. Without knowing why, perhaps at the moment without any absolute reason existing, the eye is sometimes attracted to a particular object and fixed upon its movements. The very gazing may awaken associations that had no existence before, till the eye, which had gazed without a thought or purpose, becomes fixed on the object with an interest too intense to admit of its being withdrawn. Such at least was the manner in which the young man's observation had become riveted on a person rather under than above the middle size, having a large cloak drawn closely round him with a sedulous care, which, joined to the drawn-down hat and engulfing neckcloth, bespoke a fearfulness of cold or detection. Wherever he moved, the young man's look was on him ; and no sooner had the vessel neared the shore, than, springing on the pier, he hastened to approach him.

The muffled stranger was speaking to the mate in a low, and, the young man considered, a feigned voice, asking when he would sail, and seeking to hide under a careless manner a real anxiety to depart to another land. It looks ill to leave your country with a shrouded face, and the young man watched him more closely. The mate, predicting less boisterous weather, hoped they should sail within an hour. The intelligence was evidently pleasing to the stranger, who calling to a porter, gave him directions as to bringing down his luggage.

“What name did you say, sir?” inquired the porter.

“Williams,” replied the stranger, louder than he had yet spoken, as though rather desiring than objecting to the publication of his name.

In turning from the vessel, the stranger encountered the eyes of the young man fixed steadily upon him. He started, and changing his course, mingled in with a group of men

talking loudly and eagerly together, and then passed through them round a large pile of goods lying on the pier without heeding the young man's exclamation of "Mr. Sawyer!" though he must have heard it. But the young man was not to be thus cut. After a moment's pause of doubtful thought, he followed his retreating acquaintance, smiling amid his anxiety at his late conversation, and the practical illustration which he was thus giving of the wisdom or folly of acting on those lightning perceptions and sudden impulses against which the elderly gentleman had so loudly exclaimed. He was aware of the boldness of his resolve—it was one of those acts that would be judged of from its success; but he was wanting in neither moral nor physical courage, and the very impulse which urged him on supplied force for the act to which it impelled him.

The impulse of a fool—if a fool can have such strong impulse as to be compelled, so to speak, to a daring deed—will taste of folly;

the impulse of the sensible may boast of wisdom ; but a steady practised judgment is the safest guide. These sudden impulses may lead to noble and daring deeds—may cut the Gordian knot of difficulties ; but they may also lead to foolish and degrading acts, and tie the Gordian knot rather than unloose it. We may rue too late the yielding to impulse till it demands and exerts the rule. In the present instance it was the impulse of action, springing from the deductions and combinations of thought and judgment, and there was no time to pause. Where there is concealment, there is generally guilt ; and the young man felt convinced that the person he followed was a villain flying from the fear of justice.

Placing one hand on the pile of goods round which the stranger had turned, and lightly vaulting first on the top and then down on the other side, he stood before the object of his search, who, not expecting such a mode of approach, was half crouching down, and alter-

nately watching either end of the long heap, that he might make his escape if necessary.

“Mr. Sawyer,” said the young man, laying firm hold of his arm, “you do not cross to France to-day.”

“Why not, Mr. Gordon?—who shall prevent me?—I must,” stammered out Mr. Sawyer, finding further avoidance was out of the question and vainly endeavouring to appear at ease.

“I shall prevent your going to France,” replied Walter Gordon, for it was he, speaking with increasing boldness and decision as his suspicions became confirmed by his companion’s confusion.

“And by what right, and for what purpose would you detain me?” demanded Sawyer, trying to rally.

“By a right which you will not dispute—for the purpose of accompanying me back to Fairport.”

“ Back to Fairport !” faltered the *détenu*. “ I have business in France — important business, which must be transacted first.”

“ It is no business connected with the house which you would transact in France, Mr. Sawyer. It is for nothing which will advantage Mr. Lyle that you are so anxious to proceed thither, concealing face and name, and shrinking from a recognition.”

Mr. Sawyer turned deadly pale, and cowered under Gordon’s keen, stern look.

“ Where is your authority for this detention ?” he demanded after a short pause.

“ We will not waste time in words, Mr. Sawyer. You return to Fairport immediately, either in my company—with every outward mark of attention—or you return thither in a little time in company less agreeable and less respectful. Make your choice—there is no alternative. You must know me too well to hope to turn me from my purpose.”

The wretched man did know him too well to

entertain any such hope, and overcome by the consciousness of his guilt, and fear of its consequences, (little suspecting that Gordon's determination was entirely founded on his own conduct,) he yielded without further struggle to the terrors which oppressed him, and appealed to his detainer's pity, knowing well that his former powers of deception, even could he command them—which he could not, so unexpected was his detention—would in the present instance avail him nothing.

“ Spare me, Mr. Gordon ! Take me not back to Fairport ! save me from that shame, and I will repair the evil done as far as may be.”

Gordon was silent, shocked at his abject manner, and almost alarmed at this confirmation of the truth of his suspicions and the success of his determination. The trembling pleader, considering his silence and his look as unpropitious, again endeavoured to obtain forbearance.

“ As you hope for mercy hereafter, grant it me now ! My public shame cannot advantage you, and will injure the credit of the house. And my death,” he continued wildly, unable to control the terror which oppressed him, “ that would not serve you ! Surely you would not take my life ? I have heard Mr. Lyle and yourself say life should only be forfeited when life had been taken. Spare me, Mr. Gordon !—spare me ! I will reveal all—place every paper in your hands. Only let me depart, none shall know whence or whither, and none shall hear of me again.”

Gordon was at the instant little less agitated than the wretched being before him. It was dreadful to see one with the education and manners of a gentleman, and who had till now been considered an honourable man, reduced by his own guilt to plead in abject terms for the life forfeited, by his own confession, to the laws of his country. But this was the moment for action, not for reflection or deliberation ;

and, checking his own emotion, he resumed his former decided tone, softened a little by pity, though he saw that the guilty man grieved not for his guilt, but for its consequences.

“ I do not seek your life, Mr. Sawyer, and it is possible that Mr. Lyle may think as I do ; but you must accompany me back to Fairport. Mr. Lyle cannot leave it at present, and I cannot enter into a final arrangement with you except with his positive sanction.”

“ You would deceive me, Mr. Gordon,—you do seek my life ! I will not go back to Fairport ! as well die here at once ;” and the shuddering wretch glanced at the sea before him.

“ I would not deceive you, Mr. Sawyer ; and you should feel that I would not !” replied Gordon, holding his arm more firmly. “ Reveal all ! Repair, as far as you can, the evil you have done : accompany me back without further opposition, and I think I may pledge myself for Mr. Lyle that you shall then be permitted to depart, and without a further

announcement of your guilt. Believe me, I have no wish to do you evil, and our travelling together will rather silence than awaken suspicion."

"Do you pledge yourself for my safety?" demanded Sawyer with gasping eagerness.

"I do! if you conceal nothing," replied Gordon solemnly.

"Then I submit," faltered his companion.

Gordon never lost sight of his prisoner, for such he might be termed, for a single moment; and as soon as the necessary arrangements were completed at the Custom House and hotel, started with him in a chaise and four for Fairport. Aware of the advantage which his companion's present dread afforded him, and fearful he might resume his usual caution, Gordon learnt from him every important particular, as far as the necessity of concealing his own ignorance permitted. Well was it that he did so; for ere they reached Fairport, Mr. Sawyer seemed half to repent his openness, and

gave brief and rather sullen answers. But his returning caution was too late to serve him: Gordon had received from his lips nearly every requisite information, and from his hands every necessary paper, to avert or remedy the evil; and that evil was of sufficient magnitude to cause him to tremble for the stability of the house, and to make him wish that the laws against forgery had been less severe, that he might without compunction have subjected Sawyer to their penalty.

Whilst acting for Mr. Lyle during his late illness, Gordon became aware that Sawyer had urged his partner to enter into some of the extravagant speculations of that speculating period — to purchase shares in companies which no reasonable man expected to succeed, and had been surprised at conduct so contrary to his general prudence:—the cause was now fully explained. Mr. Lyle, secure in his immense wealth, had become indolent, as many had remarked, and yielded to his plausible

partner, not only the acting part in most transactions, but, in some late instances, had also deferred to his judgment. As the acting and active partner, by inducing Mr. Lyle to withdraw large sums which he had placed in secure investments in case of any sudden emergency, and to invest them again according to his wishes and under another name, Mr. Sawyer obtained complete control over a great portion of the capital of the house ; and, in the height of his fear, he confessed that, instead of engaging in speculations which he himself considered dangerous, he had placed the money in the French and other funds, deceiving his unsuspecting partner by paying the dividends supposed due on the different shares he had never in reality purchased,—and all this with the intention of flying England on the first favourable opportunity, and living in splendour in some foreign land on the wealth thus iniquitously obtained. Compunction for the shame and poverty he would thus bring on his kind

and confiding partner, to whom he was so much indebted, appeared never to have disturbed his mind.

Gordon's interference had checked his course, but not turned him from it ; and no sooner had he withdrawn, than it was again pursued ; and, despite Gordon's warnings, who had suspected villainy, but could not prove it from his short stay, was Mr. Lyle duped by his clever but designing partner. The villainy was now confessed : and to such an extent had it been carried, that a wealthier house than Mr. Lyle's might have felt, if not fallen beneath the shock ; particularly as the sums deposited in foreign funds, and for which vouchers were shown, bore but a small proportion to the sums withdrawn from the safe investments in England. Gordon remarked strongly on the deficiency, declaring his pledge of safety was only given in return for perfect candour : but neither question, argument, nor threat, produced a beneficial result.

Mr. Sawyer asserted, and with a boldness which looked like truth, that in giving up those vouchers, he gave up all the wealth which he then possessed. The remainder of his unhallowed gains had passed into other hands—how, he could not or would not tell with any precision ; though he owned to debts of long standing when he became a partner, and gambling and many other follies since. And with this information Gordon was obliged to be contented for the present.

As Walter entered Mr. Lyle's counting-house, accompanied by Mr. Sawyer, he marked the wondering and mysterious looks exchanged between the clerks ; whilst the cautious Walton was so strongly moved, that he started up abruptly, and grasped Gordon's hand with a half-checked expression of thankfulness.

“ Where is Mr. Lyle ? ” asked Gordon, returning the friendly pressure.

“ In his private room. Shall I let him know that you are here ? ”

"I will announce myself, whilst you furnish Mr. Sawyer with the information he desires."

Walton followed them into an inner apartment.

"Do not leave him a moment!" whispered Gordon to the clerk as he quitted the room by another door to seek Mr. Lyle, for his prisoner's late silence had made him suspicious.

No sooner had he left the room, than the culprit's silence ceased, and recovering his self-possession, he conversed with Walton with an ease and freedom that puzzled the bewildered clerk.

"Walter, my dear boy! I am delighted to see you!" exclaimed Mr. Lyle, starting up and grasping both his visitor's hands. "Looking all life and energy too!—a different person from when you left us. I could not send for you after what you told me; but now that you are come of your own accord, and I trust as willing as ever to serve me, I will tell you at once what I wish you to do for me—and that is, to

hunt out Sawyer. He has been absent some days—I can get no answer from him, and he has vouchers of shares in those new companies into which I was fool enough to purchase, and other papers, without which I cannot take up money. I believe Walton and some of the other clerks are silly enough to think he has absconded ;” added the speaker, trying to look as if he considered the idea an excellent jest.

“ I am happy to say I have anticipated your wishes : Mr. Sawyer accompanied me to Fairport, and is now in the next room.”

“ Eh ! what ? Then we will have a good laugh at Walton,” said the merchant joyfully.

“ Take care, sir, or Walton will have a good laugh at you ;” and Gordon briefly explained his meeting with the absconding partner, and subsequent proceedings ; only omitting his suspicions having been awakened by a letter from Walton, half cautious, half candid, urging him to come over and counteract Sawyer’s increasing influence, ending with a desire for the in-

stant destruction of the letter and silence as to the writer, and adorned with a timid postscript very like a contradiction of the intelligence in the body of the letter.

The merchant's florid cheek blanched at the extent of his loss and the magnitude of his peril ;—but it was now that the noblest parts of his character were to show forth. A mean and more sordid mind would have heaped abuse on Sawyer : Mr. Lyle thanked Gordon and blamed himself, before he censured his partner.

“Walter, you have again saved me from ruin ;—at least, I hope you have. Would I had a second Florence to bestow upon you !”

Both turned away to conceal their emotions. Gordon felt his service was duly appreciated, and was more than repaid.

“It was a bold act !” remarked Mr. Lyle.

“But for a solid judgment, your quick spirit would lead you into danger. Suppose Sawyer had been innocent, what would you have done ?”

“Made an ample apology, and borne the

shame of my error: but, if innocent, he would not have cowered beneath my glance."

Your skill in reading looks was always beyond my comprehension: you seem possessed of some divining rod by which to discover the hidden springs in men's minds. I would shun you had I anything to conceal; you appear to be actuated by some uncontrollable impulse, and yet to exercise a sound judgment at the same time. Well, if I could boast of a judgment as sound! I fear I have been much to blame — heedless of warnings — swayed by honeyed words—indolent in action. I must be merciful to Sawyer, for the sin is partly mine. You pledged yourself to permit his departure, I think you said, within a week?"

" Yes, if perfectly candid."

" Right! I would not harm him,—that is, to the last extent,—though some maintain that the law is not too harsh. Let those who think so act upon it: I should be loth to take life only for the loss of gold. You will stay with

me, Walter, and assist me in my difficulties,—will you not?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Thank you, my boy: I wish I could repay you!"

"I am repaid," replied the young man, pressing his hand.

Some further time was spent in consultation as to their future proceedings: and Gordon strongly urged Mr. Lyle to examine all his papers, and be quite sure no further evil had been done, before he allowed Sawyer to depart, stating his suspicions from the guilty man's manner that there was still something kept back, though he might have spoken the truth, where he spoke at all.

"I think you are seeing too much now, Walter," replied the merchant with a faint smile: "he has owned to having possessed himself of all the money over which my carelessness gave him power. My other arrangements and concerns have been beyond his in-

fluence, having always received the interest myself, and kept the papers connected with them: and I am most thankful for having done so. There is yet some hope for me."

" You are quite sure you have those papers, sir?"

" Quite sure; I saw them this morning: you must not let your penetration descend into suspicion. And now I had better see Sawyer, though I shrink from the meeting nearly as much as the wretched man himself can do. I almost forget his guilt and its consequences, considering how much he must suffer from remorse."

" I knew that such would be your feelings, when I pledged myself for his safety; but you must not let them become a weakness. You must not judge him by yourself; I fear his present mood is to be still more condemned than pitied."

" It may be! but I have myself done that lately which I thought never to have done, and must be merciful."

“ Be merciful, sir ! but be also just, I entreat you. There are still some points unexplained, on which I feared to touch, lest I should betray my bold self-acting ; and all should be cleared up before you permit him to depart.”

“ Yes, yes, Walter ! I will be firm and learn all ; but you must leave us together. I see you think me scarcely fit to be trusted, but I will prove I am. I should suffer more if you witnessed his shame.”

It might have puzzled a common observer to tell which was the guilty one, Sawyer or Lyle, on the first entrance of the former ; for the cheeks of each were blanched, and their eyes turned carefully away, whilst their voices were strange and husky.

An account of their sayings and doings would be uninteresting, being principally the same dry details of business which had occupied Gordon on the journey down. Both felt the interview painful, and made it as brief as possible. Mr. Sawyer stammered out a few

words of excuse and repentance : Mr. Lyle, in reply, stammered out a few words of forgiveness ; he could not think of the agony which he imagined his partner must be enduring, thus standing in shame before the man he had so basely injured, and yet reprove him.

Gordon and Walton were in earnest conversation when Sawyer, with his hat drawn over his eyes, passed out after his interview with Mr. Lyle.

“ I thank you, Mr. Gordon, for the past,—I now know how much I owe you ! ” said Mr. Sawyer in the muttered tone of lasting hate. “ You have crossed my path more than once : you will cross it no more.”

Startled at his words and tone, Gordon stepped forward to arrest his departure ; but Mr. Lyle spoke from the inner room, the door of which was open.

“ Mr. Sawyer is fatigued and requires rest : we shall converse again to-morrow.”

Gordon stepped aside, and then returned to

the inner room, whilst Sawyer with a bitter smile departed.

“ Sawyer answered every question, even advising me how best to remedy the evil done: and he will to-morrow morning bring me two papers, which he had inadvertently left behind him.”

Mr. Lyle spoke hurriedly, without looking at Gordon, lest he should see the extent of his pity, and guess that, touched by the wretched man's assertion of utter destitution, he had promised him a small supply on the morrow, that he might not be led by want into further crime.

Gordon made no reply, and the merchant proceeded with more self-possession.

“ We have now to consider the full extent of the threatened danger, and prepare to meet it boldly. I still hope by Heaven's blessing to stand the storm, and injure no one; though my child's portion must be less. The panic seems passing away; but should sudden calls be made upon me, I trust, with my own rescued

means and the assistance promised through Clanellon, to be able to answer all demands."

"Through Clanellon!" stammered Gordon. "Will the assistance of his friends be absolutely essential to your security?"

"It may be! What do you mean by the question, Walter,—and turning so white, and now so red? You will not allow any feeling of jealousy—dislike, I mean—to induce you to dissuade me from accepting the friendly assistance of my future son-in-law? It was natural before that you should not like him; but now, as you are going to turn benedict yourself, you will judge more correctly."

"I do not understand you, Mr. Lyle," said Gordon rather coldly.

"What! could you suppose I should not hear of your engagement to Miss Cleveland? You need not look ashamed, my boy; I hear the lady is all that is delightful, with fortune into the bargain; and I assure you Florence

and I were much pleased at the intelligence, and wished you every happiness."

"I am much obliged to Miss Lyle," remarked Gordon with a bitterness which he could not suppress. "She might have known me better: you, at least, sir, who so lately heard my confession, should not have been deceived. You did your daughter wrong in believing that I could so soon forget her."

"My poor Walter! I should not have been deceived; but I heard it positively asserted, and wished it to be true, understanding she was worthy even of you."

"Rather, I am not worthy of her, sir. She honours me with no other feeling than esteem as her brother's friend."

"I am sorry for it, as I hoped you would then have looked with a more friendly eye on Clanellon, and need not have shunned us. Florence esteems you highly, though she loves another."

"You are then quite certain that she loves Clanellon?"

“ Certain ?—to be sure I am !” replied Mr. Lyle, surprised at his young favourite’s importunity, that appeared almost indelicate. “ Why should you doubt it ?”

“ Oh, no matter, sir,—I have little cause for the doubt,” replied Gordon in a melancholy tone ; then added with emotion, “ I am most miserable !—in serving you, I wreck her happiness.”

“ What do you mean, Walter ?” asked his alarmed companion. “ I insist on candour.”

“ You shall have it, sir. I have no right to conceal what has come to my knowledge, however invidious its disclosure may appear : it will then be for you to decide as you please. Most sincerely do I wish that the unwelcome task had fallen on another ; but I hope—I trust you will not believe me influenced by unworthy motives. Since she loves him — would to Heaven that he deserved her love !”

“ Take care, Gordon,” said Mr. Lyle rather

sternly. “I wish to hear no idle tales of Clanellon, and should be sorry to believe you capable of retailing slander to blacken a rival’s fame. He has proved himself my friend.”

“He is a villain!” exclaimed Gordon impetuously; “and the whole of my conduct which has fallen under your observation should have saved me from the suspicion of retailing an idle slander of a successful rival blessed with her love. Read that, sir,” putting the paper signed by the wounded gambler into his hands.

Before Mr. Lyle had finished reading the paper, it fell from his hands, and he sank back in his chair with a deep groan.

Gordon sprang forward, knelt before him, and chafed his cold hands in his, pouring forth in broken words his sorrow at his precipitancy and its consequences.

“Forgive me, my more than father! I was wounded by your suspicions, and only thought

of clearing myself. I did not think—I had no idea you would have been so affected."

"Leave me," said Mr. Lyle, withdrawing his hands; "I would be alone. All wrong and deceive me!—Sawyer, and now Clanellon: I can trust none. Yet my child—my dear Florence!—she will not deceive me. Go, I say!—I will trust no one else. Why do you wait? Do you expect a reward for the discovery? Go! go! I will send you money. I shall be rich soon, for I shall give to none and trust to none. Go, I tell you!"

Gordon rose sadly and slowly; his lip quivered, his frame shook, and his voice was as if it came from out of the tomb.

"I go as you bid me! I see you no more! Keep your gold for those who prize it—I seek no reward for unmasking villainy.—I would have spared you and her the misery had I dared. Farewell! my gratitude will be ever yours!"

He turned slowly to the door, and his fingers were on the lock.

Mr. Lyle rose hastily, placed his hand on his arm, and looked keenly into his face.

“Why, you do not triumph, Walter ! you look wretched too,” bursting into a wild laugh.

“I am as wretched as yourself, Mr. Lyle. Your words have sunk deep, and I grieve for her.”

“For her ? Oh yes, poor Florence ! We must forget our own sorrow to comfort her. Those I have so trusted !—he whom I had regarded—relied on as a son ! He to deceive me—to seem to pity, to say kind things only to lure me on to evil—to tempt me to the gaming-table, and bribe one to play the cheat, and then to act the friend—the warm, the generous friend—and thus win my child ! And yet he could take my hand, and sit at my table, and look and smile in my face !—It is horrible to think upon it !—I could forgive and pity Sawyer ;—but Clanellon——How can I ever trust again !”

Overcome by the shock and the idea of what

Florence would endure, his head sank on Gordon's shoulder, who was too much moved to speak.

"You tremble, Walter," said Mr. Lyle, raising his head and again looking into his face. "Would you deceive me too? Would you seem to pity, only the better to deceive?"

"I make no protestations," replied Gordon, hurt at his doubts, though sympathising with his feelings. "Judge of me by the past. Could my father's son act so base a part?"

"No, Walter, he could not! I may yet trust you; you will not deceive me!"

"Never!"

"And you will not leave me, Walter? You will forget my bitter words?"

"They are already forgotten. I remember only your kindness."

"Bless you, Walter! Then I may trust my children still;" and his head again rested on his shoulder with the confidence of childhood.

Gordon led him back to his chair with the respectful tenderness of a son, again knelt before him—soothed and calmed him—wooed him to hope and trust, till the sobs that had burst from the overcharged breast were hushed, and the heart so tried by the falsehood of those on whom it had relied recovered from the shock.

“ You must think me weak—very weak ! ” said Mr. Lyle in some embarrassment when restored to composure.

“ I feel how sorely you have been tried,” replied Walter respectfully.

“ You are a noble creature, Walter ! I wish ——But it is folly to deplore the past. I hope a higher fortune is before you, for my child may be a beggar.—First for business, and then for revealing this to Florence. Ought I to conceal it from her, in pity to her love ? ”

“ It is for you to decide,” said Gordon hastily, turning away as he spoke.

Mr. Lyle sighed.

“There can be no mistake. Let me look at the paper again.”

Gordon handed it with a still-averted head.

There could be no mistake,—that is, if the words of a dying man were to be believed. The paper was the confession of John Shaw, signed by him in the presence of creditable witnesses, amongst others Sir Charles Cleveland, in which he clearly stated how, when, and where he had been bribed by Lord Clanellon personally, and through his agent Hislop, to induce Mr. Lyle to play, and, by using false dies, ensure his losing to a large amount. Clanellon had been too wary to commit himself by writing; but every minute circumstance of time and place was so distinctly stated, that his evidence could not be disputed, confirmed as it was by a note from Hislop appointing him to be at the very place where he had won the money, at the very time at which he had so won it; and by the corresponding of the signature with the false receipt given by Clan-

ellon to the merchant on the following day. Shaw's detection by Clanellon in some former unfair dealing had placed him in his lordship's power, and compelled him to become his tool.

His paying so large a debt was a splendid piece of generosity!—a decided proof of his love for Florence. As such her father considered it, and it was annoying to find his admiration thrown away; but it would have been folly to doubt the truth of the confession.

“This relieves me from an immense and awkward obligation, and perhaps I should rejoice that my folly, to use a milder term than I should use, will not be attended by worse consequences than those which may ensue; and they are not likely to be slight. But how did you obtain this confession? Does the whole world know of my shame?”

“Its dictator, after winning a large sum at a gaming-table in Paris by something besides honest skill, was attacked by two ruffians on his way home and dangerously wounded.

Hearing his call for help, I rendered him some assistance, and at the approach of others the men fled. I had him taken to his home — watched by him, and suspecting the truth from his broken exclamations, prevailed on him to dictate and sign this paper. To secure you from all claim on Lord Clanellon's part, it was necessary to procure trustworthy witnesses; but I also chose those on whose discretion I could rely, as the less the subject is discussed the better."

"Ever-thoughtful and kind Walter! and you were wounded in serving me! I see now that your arm is in a sling. Selfish, unfeeling, not to see this before!"

"Too slightly to be named; do not think of it."

"This shall be looked to: you always made light of your own injuries. Is Shaw in danger?"

"I believe he is, though not immediate: I hope he is a penitent."

“ We will hope he is ;—at least, it is not for me to judge him harshly, who could, at my age, be so easily overcome by a temptation which I had often in the case of others declared to be unworthy of the name. My pride deserved this humbling, and I must strive to bear it patiently ; but it shocks me to think that one whom I esteemed so highly can be so base. Another consequence of my fault, or of this discovery, should my poor child reject him now, will be the withdrawal of the aid promised by the two houses he has influenced ; and this may seal my ruin. And yet Florence must be told ! I ought not to conceal it from her, however she may suffer ; and if once told, my high-minded child will break off the engagement. But she must be told, Walter ? ”

Walter said nothing.

“ My poor child !—and this is all my doing ! ” continued the unhappy father, clasping his hands. “ My house failing—my child broken-hearted ! ”

“ We will hope neither,” said Gordon gently. “ For Miss Lyle’s grief I have no cure; and fear that she must hate me, as the agent of this discovery:—for your other fear I can offer some slight relief. My little fortune, still in the bank into which you paid it, is ready for your use: beyond this trifle, I have full authority from Sir Charles Cleveland to place twenty thousand pounds at your disposal, without inquiry or condition: and if, after examination, I should think your security sufficient to ensure him from loss, I am empowered to offer you the loan of fifty thousand more. Besides, I cannot believe that Lord Clanellon will not interfere to check the aid already promised.”

“ Is this true, Walter, or am I dreaming? or are you going to deceive like Clanellon, and buy my child by seeming kindness?” demanded the merchant, bewildered by what he had heard and relapsing into his former suspicion.

Gordon leant for support against the mantel-piece; his chest heaved — the blood sprang

beneath the pressure of his teeth on his livid lip in the endeavour to suppress all utterance of his anguish. Mr. Lyle watched him in silent wonder, his own placid temper causing him to marvel at the excitement of his more fiery-tempered companion.

“Are you ill, Walter?” he asked earnestly, quite forgetting the purport of his late words.

“Ill, sir? And is it for you to ask the question?” burst from the agitated Gordon. “I have borne your insulting suspicions once to-day; I submitted in silence to the cruel outrage—I passed it over, I thought no more of it. I remembered only your former kindness: better that I had then departed than have stayed to endure this second insult. I, Walter Gordon, buy your child by seeming kindness!—I purchase Florence Lyle by baseness! You do not know me, Mr. Lyle! I love your daughter more than life—but I love honour, virtue, more than either. I considered it a duty to

unmask villainy: that I have inflicted pain is my misery, and not my fault. I will make every necessary arrangement for the advances with Walton, and shall intrude on you no more."

"Walter! Walter! you shall not go!" exclaimed Mr. Lyle, catching his hand. "You would not leave me in my sorrow and anxiety for a few harsh words that were not meant? Think what I have endured to-day!"

"And have I endured nothing?" asked Gordon, touched by the appeal, backed as it was by the glistening eyes of the speaker. "Why do you utter words which have no meaning?—or, if they have a meaning, prove me unfit to stand before you?"

"Because I am not myself. I have found falsehood where I looked for honour; I have won my child to bestow her love on one who will break the heart that trusted him; and now I have wounded you, the best, the truest friend man ever had!—you too who suffer with

me! Bear with me, Walter! But for the thoughts of you and my gentle child, I should go wild."

Gordon could resist no longer; he pressed the hand that detained him, and took a seat in silence beside the merchant.

"And this offer, Walter,—I should thank you for this—to you I owe it, for I know little of Sir Charles Cleveland."

"I will not deny that to his regard for me you are indebted for the advance; but you must not think the less of it on that account."

"I do not: I owe him the more for his regard to you.—But time is wearing now, and Florence will be anxious. Will you return with me to Atherton?"

"Better not," replied the agitated Gordon. "My presence would appear obtrusive and indequate. I parted from Miss Lyle in sorrow, but in kindness: I would not meet her in coldness or in anger. I will see you here tomorrow morning."

“ You are right, Walter ; but I am loth to leave you and shrink from meeting Florence.— Yet it must be done !—you will think of me kindly till to-morrow.”

“ Doubt it not, sir.”

CHAPTER V.

“ Who shall woman’s meaning find ?
Who shall read a woman’s mind ?”

“ His chain of gold the king unstrung,
The links o’er Malcolm’s neck he flung ;
Then gently drew the glitt’ring band,
And laid the clasp on Ellen’s hand.”

The Lady of the Lake.

THE SONG OF FLORENCE.

WHERE are the hopes whose splendours shed
Their glory o’er life’s dawn ?
Oh, I have wept—for they are fled !—
Have sigh’d—for they are gone !
Come back ! come back ! in all your pow’r—
In all your beauty come !
Though ye may linger but one hour,
Yet make my heart your home !

They come ! they come ! those hopes of light
That gladden'd life's young morn !
And earth and sky grow rich and bright,
As when they first were born.
I see them in the distance there,
Their splendours glorious still !
Will they not come near and more near ?
They move not at my will !

They come not near ! their glories fade !
Their splendours pass away !
Their brightness dims till all is shade—
Oh, stay ! one moment stay !—
It cannot be ! it cannot be !
The storm sweeps through the sky :—
The tempest mutters as I see
The last faint glory die !

Thus sang Florence Lyle ! Clanellon and others had found fault with her singing as being cold and deficient in feeling : had they heard her then, the censure would have been recalled with wonder that it had been ever uttered. Julia Desmond's voice might have been still allowed its superiority in quality, but the song of Florence would have lived in the memory long after Julia's most exquisite perform-

ance had been forgotten : the one gratified the ear, the other was engraven on the heart.

Florence had seated herself at her harp to wile away the time till her father's return, and banish anxious thoughts ; but her selection of a song had been unwise—if selection that could be called which was in fact a sudden burst of feeling beyond her power to control. The chords had not ceased to vibrate—the large tears which had come unbidden still lingered on her dark lashes—the drooping head was resting on the hand, when a sigh close beside her caused her to turn round. There stood her father, pale and motionless, looking at her in anxious sadness.

“ You are ill—you are agitated, my dear father!” she exclaimed, throwing her arms around him. “ Something I know has occurred,—you cannot deceive me.”

He pressed her to his heart, but did not speak.

“ Tell me all, dear father ; I can bear every-

thing but this silence — this fearful silence !”

“ Something has happened, my dear child ; but I fear to distress you : every tear you shed is a new pang.”

“ Do not fear my fortitude : only tell me.”

“ Alas, my child ! you overrate your strength :—my fondest hopes are blighted.”

“ Then, what you feared has come ; our house has suspended payment. I do not overrate my strength ; I feel this blow as a merchant's daughter must, the more deeply since you will suffer ;—but only tell me we shall injure no one by our loss, and you shall never see a cloud upon my brow. In your fond affection for your child, you circled her with pomp ; but she only prized such pomp as the offering of your love : leave her but that, dear father—only smile upon your child—only spare her the pain of seeing you unhappy, and she will think all other trials light.”

“ My noble child ! my generous, my high-

minded Florence ! Always thinking of others rather than yourself."

" Not so, dear father ! I am the most selfish of the selfish. It is because your sorrow pains me that I dread it.—But tell me, how has this happened ? Is Mr. Sawyer really gone ?"

" He is at Fairport now : Robert Lyle is not yet a bankrupt," he said rather proudly, a little—a very little hurt that Florence should have so readily believed the event a possibility. " It was not of such a misfortune that I spoke."

" Of what then, dear father ?" asked his daughter anxiously, looking paler than before, though she had felt the fancied failure more deeply than her words had told.

To what her fears pointed now she did not say ; but it was clear that her alarm had not decreased.

Mr. Lyle had been settling in his own mind all the way from Fairport what would be the best method of breaking the intelligence to

Florence from which he dreaded such painful effects; but now that the moment was arrived to pursue this method, he did what many a one has done before,—namely, forgot all the preconcerted plan, and, confused by her eager questions and anxious looks, dashed into the subject at once with a wild hurry and indistinctness sufficient to alarm the most courageous.

“ Speak, dear father! in pity speak!” pleaded Florence more and more agitated.

“ I will, my child; but compose yourself! Gordon has — Clanellon is — But you are fainting Florence; let me ring.”

“ No, no! In pity speak! What of them? —have they met?”

“ Met, my child? No!”

“ What then? Is he ill—dying? Speak! —tell me all,” gasped the fainting Florence.

“ No, my child! Clanellon is well! But—”

“ But what?”

“ Compose yourself! I fear to tell you.”

“ Fear not!—anything but this suspense!”

“ Well, then, since I must speak, Clanellon is not quite what we believed him,—in short, he is a villain.”

“ Is that all?”

“ All! Florence. Is not that enough?”

“ Thank Heaven!” murmured Florence, her head sinking on her father’s shoulder as she gave way to a passionate burst of tears.

“ Thank Heaven that Clanellon is a villain!” exclaimed her father in utter amazement, fearing her reason had been overthrown by the sudden shock.

“ No, not quite that: it would be sinful,” faltered the still-weeping Florence, struggling to suppress her tears.—“ But you spoke of Mr. Gordon. What of him?—is he ill?”

“ Quite well! I meant to say he had—I mean he is——”

“ Married!” said Florence in a low sepulchral voice, filling up the pause.

“ No, my child! there is no truth in that

report. But you are trembling sadly ; let me ring for nurse :—I knew you would be shocked."

" But Emma said it was certain ; and Sir Charles owned it," remarked Florence, pursuing the train of her own ideas, and paying little heed to any subject unconnected with them.

" There must have been some mistake. I am not acquainted with particulars ; but he denies ever having felt for Miss Cleveland, or she for him, any warmer feeling than esteem. He is indignant at our having believed the report, and says we should have known him better."

" Known him better ! — how ?" asked the trembling and bewildered Florence.

" Can you not guess, my child ? He says he is no changeling, to love to-day and put that love away to-morrow ; and that we should not have believed him capable of this."

" No changeling, to love to-day and put

away his love to-morrow ! Does he love another ?”

“ This is unlike you, Florence,—you know he does.”

“ I know not. Tell me !”

The father shook his head in grief ;—the shock had been too great for his poor child ;—but perhaps it would be better to humour her present fancy, and continue to talk of Gordon, than turn the conversation on Clanellon.

“ You know not, Florence ? Nay, do not pretend blindness, — you must have known he loved,” said her father significantly.

Florence looked wildly into her father’s face and whispered, “ Who ?”

“ Who ?” repeated her father: “ Florence Lyle !”

A rich glow came on her pale cheek — a beautiful brightness into her dark eye, — her hands were clasped — her lips moved with a murmur of thankfulness, as she hid her burning blushes on her father’s bosom.

Mr. Lyle was still more amazed. What could this mean? — A sudden fancy came across him. Had he been blind so long? And Walter, had he been deceived?

“ Florence, what does all this mean?”

Florence did not speak; but he felt her clinging to him.

“ Florence, my child, speak! and speak truly to your father. Why should you fear to answer him? Do you love Walter Gordon?” gently lifting up her fair face, stroking back her dark hair, and pressing his lips upon her brow.

“ Come, Florence! you must say yes or no: there can be no shame in either. Do you love Walter Gordon?”

Her father bent his head to catch the low murmur “ Yes,” and then let the blushing cheek again conceal itself upon his bosom.

Surprise at his blindness—pleasure that she would be spared the pain of grieving for the guilt of one she loved, and that Gordon would meet his reward, mingled with a little disap-

pointment that his child would not be a countess, as he had hoped, kept the merchant silent.

Florence construed his silence differently. She raised her head, and spoke calmly — too calmly to be natural, whilst a deadly paleness took place of her burning blushes.

“ I have owned my regard for Mr. Gordon — I have been relieved from the shame of believing that regard despised ; but I am yours, my father — yours to do with as you will. I said so before—I say so now. Your child will try to find her happiness in yours.”

“ If I asked you to give your hand to Clanellon, would you give it ?”

“ If you still asked it when you had heard all,” she replied slowly and gaspingly.

“ My child ! — my blessed child ! And you would make this sacrifice for me !” folding her fondly in his arms. “ I do not ask it, Florence. Clanellon is a villain, undeserving your regard. But you should have told me this before : — you should not have deceived me, making me,

who would yield life to bring you happiness, the instrument to cause your misery. You could not doubt my love?"

"No, not your love; but I feared to pain you, even slightly. I knew you wished me to become Lady Clanellon, and hoped by my coldness to induce his lordship to withdraw his suit, but he was too wary for me. I believed myself despised — I heard of Mr. Gordon's engagement, and clung to you more fondly still. I could not bear to see you suffer on that dreadful night."

"A dreadful night indeed, my child! more dreadful than I thought, since it had nearly wrecked your peace. I wonder at my blindness: but if a lover could not see, no marvel that a father was deceived. Mr. Gordon, as you so properly called him a while since," (Florence looked down at his quiet smile,) "must clear up these mysteries himself. He accuses you of repelling him on the day of the accident, and bidding him depart."

“ Fearing he had overheard my anxiety for his safety, and despised me for it, I treated him with studied coldness, that he might believe he had mistaken my meaning.”

“ Your sex's way ! Who shall track the windings of a woman's heart ? There have you, with your over-delicacy, made yourself and Walter miserable for months. You must make amends for it hereafter.—Have you no curiosity to hear an account of Clanellon's treachery ? And how will you repay me for my alarm lest its discovery should break your heart ?”

“ Thus, my own kind papa !” kissing his cheek.

“ Why, this is like my Florence in her young wild days. Walter will have some ado to tame you ! Yet folks call you cold !”

“ Ay, folks know nothing, and see nothing, do they ?” said she archly. “ But what does Dunrayne say ? I thought he would have written, or come himself.”

“Dunrayne! Are there more riddles to read — more windings in that woman’s heart of yours? What has Dunrayne to do with this?”

“Did not you learn Lord Clanellon’s guilt from him?”

“Certainly not! You are wild to ask.”

“From whom then?”

“From Walter Gordon himself, an hour since.”

“From Mr. Gordon? Have you seen him then?”

“Yes, I have seen Mr. Gordon: he is here.”

“Here!” exclaimed the blushing Florence, looking hurriedly round the room, more particularly near the screen, withdrawing from her father’s arms, and assuming on the instant all her woman’s dignity.

“Admirable! inimitable!” exclaimed her laughing father. “What a pity Gordon is not here to admire that dignified look!”

"I thought you said—" stammered Florence.

"I did not say that he was at Atherton; so your dignity is thrown away. Never mind; it is only a rehearsal of the real play to-morrow or next day.—But I must have this made clear about Dunrayne."

Florence explained with sufficient diffuseness to give Mr. Lyle a clear knowledge of all that it was material he should know, and to induce him to forget his vexation at another's being acquainted with his gambling in the consideration of Dunrayne's real kindness. That Gordon had traced Shaw to the gaming-house in Paris, and followed him for the express purpose of obtaining the information contained in his confession, in consequence of a letter from Dunrayne, stating all the circumstances and the possibility of Shaw's being in Paris, was not known till afterwards, Gordon having concealed it in delicacy to Mr. Lyle and his lordship.

Dunrayne believed Shaw and Hislop to be still in London, notwithstanding reports to the

contrary,—but, resolved to lose no chance of effecting his purpose, wrote to Gordon at Paris, giving a description of their persons and an account of the whole affair. Secure of Gordon's earnest exertions independent of any selfish considerations, he withheld the intelligence of his being beloved by Florence, though he reproached himself for the concealment ;—nay, whilst seeking his assistance to prevent failure, he inwardly hoped that he might not succeed,—so contending were his feelings—such a mingling of good and evil was in his heart.

All lingering regrets that Clanellon could not be his son vanished when Mr. Lyle learnt that his lordship, instead of believing himself beloved by Florence, had heard from her own lips her love for another, her dislike to himself, and had listened unmoved to her appeal. He was truly thankful that his child had been saved from a union with such a wretch, for so he termed him.

“ The second dinner-bell, and I not ready !

You must give me ten minutes' law, and banish that April face before I return. We will have a long bright summer of the heart—no tears, no storms."

Mr. Lyle's absence but little exceeded the law claimed; and he handed his child in to dinner with a look so happy and so arch, that she blushed and smiled as she had done before; whilst her self-possession was sorely tried more than once during the repast—but by looks rather than words, for he said but little even after the servant had withdrawn, and at last told her gaily to go to the drawing-room, as he wished to be alone. She departed after a playful remonstrance at his rudeness, without having ventured to inquire where Gordon then was.

Mr. Lyle had not been long alone before Walter Gordon entered the apartment with evident signs of hurry and anxiety.

" You must have flown, Walter!" shaking his hand with warmth.

"Did you think I should linger, sir? For Heaven's sake, what is the matter?—your note alarmed me!"

"I did not mean that. What did I write?"

"You merely desired me to come immediately, as something unexpected had occurred which you wished to communicate. I ventured to ask for Miss Lyle of the servant who brought the note, and was told that she was quite well."

"Oh yes, Miss Lyle is quite well," replied her father with a look and smile so equivocal that Gordon coloured.

"Then what has occurred, sir?" he asked a little proudly.

"Not Miss Lyle's illness, or I should have sent for Dr. Woolston instead of Walter Gordon," replied Mr. Lyle mischievously; then, seeing Gordon was hurt, he resumed his usual friendly manner. "I hope you will think your hasty ride requited by my intelligence. I have received a confession to match with

yours of this morning ; but I have already proved myself so awkward at explanation that I shall leave that part to another. Come with me ;" and taking his arm, he hurried the anxious Gordon into the drawing-room. Florence looked up as the door opened—uttered an indistinct exclamation—half rose and then sank down again, her eyes bent on the floor—her colour changing every instant.

Mr. Lyle took no notice of Gordon's start, but retaining his arm, led him up to Florence, and stood for some moments in silence glancing from the bowed face of the one to the troubled and changing countenance of the other.

" Why have you done this ?" asked the agitated Gordon.

" Why do you not ask for the promised confession ?" replied the happy father, smiling, though the tears glistened in his eye. " My child, look up !—it is you who must reward Walter Gordon—I cannot."

Florence ventured to raise her eyes, but meeting Gordon's, dropped them instantly.

"This is too much!" exclaimed Gordon:—
"this is too hard a trial!"

"It is no trial, Walter; you should know me better. Florence loves you—she is yours—receive her from her father;" placing her trembling hand in his. "Bless you, my children!" as his arms encircled both.

"May I hope—may I believe?" asked Gordon, pressing the hand which had been given to him, yet half doubtful of his happiness.

"Believe and hope all you wish," said the fond father, gently releasing himself from his clinging child, and resigning her to Gordon's supporting arm. "I give her to you, Walter;—that is, if you can win her consent to the transfer," he added archly. "We must have no more concealment,—that has caused misery enough already," were his parting words as he left the room.

"Pray, Miss Lyle, are we to have any tea to-night?" asked her father, re-entering the room some hours after. "I am famishing;

and I have little doubt that Walter is the like, and has been long moralising on your rudeness and neglect."

"Walter has been doing no such thing," said the happy Gordon, leading the blushing Florence to her father. "He has been thinking how he can best thank you for such a blessing."

"By making my child happy. And what have you been thinking of, Florence?"

"How I shall punish you for betraying me, and giving me such a surprise," replied his daughter with the playfulness of earlier days.

"You are saucy, Florence! I pity you, Walter, having already discovered that you will have much ado to tame her. Are you bold enough to undertake the task?"

"I will venture. I fear nothing and no one now; but feel as if I were the conqueror of the world."

"Heyday! the danger is on your part, Florence: depend upon it, he will play the tyrant. What say you?"

“That I will trust him !”

“And be a slave ?”

“A most submissive one.”

“You may spare your thanks and protestations, Walter ; rely upon it, she will turn out a very shrew,” said Mr. Lyle, delighted at the happy gaiety of his children, as he termed them, and quite forgetting for a time that banks could break or houses fail, or that he had so lately set his heart upon a titled son-in-law.

Woe that there are so many disagreeables in this strange world, and that one can so seldom or for so short a time forget them ! Or rather, woe that we do not bear them more patiently, and think of them as we should !

CHAPTER VI.

A thousand misfortunes are less affecting than a single kindness.

Pelham.

Lovely princess, cast away sorrow !
Bibi is coming to wish you good Morrow !

Fairy Tale.

THE breakfast at Atherton had already been prolonged later than usual, all feeling so happy that each was loth to break up the party, when the announcement that Mr. Walton had come over to Fairport and wished to speak to Mr. Lyle, surprised and startled him and his children.

“ Let him come hither,” insisted Florence with playful peremptoriness. “ It will not be

the first time of my transacting business with him. Shall I play forger again, papa?"

"Chains for Walter!—but a visit from my cautious clerk looks like some new and alarming misfortune."

And a new and alarming misfortune it was in the cautious clerk's mind,—no less than the departure of Mr. Sawyer long before the time appointed for his interview with Mr. Lyle. He had gone to his room early complaining of fatigue—his bed had not been slept in, and no one knew when or whither he had departed.

"It does not matter," remarked Mr. Lyle; "I am not surprised that he should shrink from the meeting, and the papers he was to have brought are not material. I shall return to Fairport with Walton. Will you accompany me, Gordon? or must you see Florence's flower-garden, concerning which you have been making such polite inquiries?"

"It is an absolute necessity that I should see the flower-garden."

“ I thought as much. Rejoin me in two hours then ; and please to ride a little slower than you did last night : you were taken for the Wild Huntsman. But perhaps the caution is useless.”

“ Quite so ! I shall scarcely ride as quickly from Atherton as towards it ; and the blame of last night must rest with your note.”

“ I will bear the blame this once ; but, remember, I am not answerable for your sins for the future.”

Mr. Lyle had departed ; the garden had been looked at—or rather, walked through, for the old gardener asserted that the lovers only saw each other ; and Walter and Florence were standing at that very window where they had last stood together on the evening before the former’s departure.

“ No, I shall make no more admissions,” said the blushing Florence in answer to some request of her companion’s. “ I marvel how you can have the face to ask it, when on this

very spot you declared your unbelief of my assertion, that gauds and glitter were not absolutely essential to my happiness."

" Be merciful ! Consider how I have been punished for my scepticism ! I cannot describe to you the sufferings of that night."

Florence thought that she too had suffered—but she did not say so.

" I am not quite sure that you have suffered sufficiently," she answered archly. " What if I avowed an amazing predilection for a title ?"

" I should infallibly play sceptic again."

" You are presuming !"

" Am I, Florence ?"

They were still conversing, of course wittily and brilliantly, though we never could learn exactly what they said, when the loud stamping of a foot made both turn round, and there stood Dunrayne, who never would be announced, his cheek flushed with passion, and feeding his fury as of old by listening to their words.

" How shall we thank you ?" said the lovers

at once, each advancing with an extended hand; but Dunrayne crossed his behind him, looking by no means appeased.

“Is this honourable, Mr. Gordon?” he demanded fiercely.

“Is it otherwise, Lord Dunrayne?” asked Gordon, checking his anger, though he crimsoned at the question. “I avowed my love when we last met, though I believed it scorned: and I told you that I should visit Fairport in my letter announcing the discovery of Shaw. If I am now blessed with the certainty that she whom I have so long loved is not indifferent, I have acquired that certainty by no dishonourable means:—I came hither at the express desire of Mr. Lyle:—my hopes have his sanction.”

“Then Mr. Lyle changes as others. I thought he desired rank for his daughter.”

“If Mr. Lyle desired rank, you know that his daughter never did,” said Florence, stepping between the two young men, and entreating

Gordon's forbearance by a look. "Dunrayne," she continued, laying a gentle touch upon his arm, "I owe you — we all owe you much. But for you, I might have been miserable for life ! You have triumphed over Lord Clanel-lon,—now triumph over yourself. You may mar much of my happiness ; but do not so : rather let me owe its fulness to your generous forbearance."

" You expect to manage me, as you have done before ; but I am not always to be fool-ed : — I had hopes then," he replied sullenly, shunning her pleading look.

" I never deceived you, Dunrayne. You had then my regard — you have now my grati-tude ; I would add, my admiration. Do not, I entreat you, teach me to esteem you less : let me still regard you as a highly-valued friend. You will not disappoint my hopes ?"

He looked into her eyes, beautiful in their touching earnestness,—he listened to her gentle tones, so soothing, yet so moving : his wrath

calmed, the expression of his features softened, and he took her hand.

“ Florence, can you ask me to yield you to another?—you, whom I have loved from childhood?”

“ Yes, Dunrayne, I do ask it; by that very love. I expect it from your generosity.”

He gazed at her some moments in silence. She had moved his better feelings, and they triumphed: but the struggle was severe, as he thought of her becoming the bride of another. Her love he could not win—her esteem he would deserve.

“ So be it, Florence! I will not wound that noble heart—I will not cause a tear. I resign her to you, Gordon, with less reluctance than I should resign her to another. Forget my violence! May you be happy! I shall see Florence Lyle no more.”

Raising the hand he held one moment to his lips, he rushed from the room before either could stay or thank him.

The intelligence brought back from Fairport was anything but pleasant. The flight of Sawyer had got abroad ; its cause was rumoured, and the credit of the house was shaken. Of course, under such circumstances, those who had claims were likely to apply ; and it was considered prudent that Gordon should depart for Paris that very night, with full powers to receive the money lodged there by Sawyer, of whose house and furniture a person had taken possession in right of a deed, completed a few days before, making them over to him for a certain sum. Had proof been wanting, here it was that his flight had been duly considered and arranged. For further security, Walton was to proceed to town on the following morning, to provide for the speedy transfer of those sums reserved for an emergency which had escaped Sawyer's rapacity, and for the purpose of fully ascertaining how matters stood with some other connexions, Mr. Lyle's presence at Fairport being considered absolutely necessary since

the flight of his partner: nor was any precaution omitted that prudence could dictate. The next day was a day of anxiety; but there was nothing particularly distressing in its occurrences, though the reports were not agreeable, as those reports asserted Mr. Lyle's loss to be still greater than he believed it to be.

The following morning, as Florence was wiling away the time in the completion of a drawing begun under Gordon's inspection during his former visit, she was surprised by the unexpected arrival of Sir Charles Cleveland, who expressed some wonder and vexation at having crossed Gordon on the road to Paris, whence he had come direct, though he had not expected to find him at Atherton.

“He is gone on business for my father and will return in a few days,” said Florence blushing.

“Return hither, to Atherton?” asked Sir Charles, surprised.

“Yes.”

“And for any time?—to remain here?”

“ Probably.”

“ May I then congratulate my friend—may I hope he is happy, Miss Lyle ?”

“ He says so,” replied Florence, looking down.

“ I am rejoiced ! and most sincerely congratulate you both,” said the warm-hearted baronet, guessing the truth. “ I do not know Gordon’s equal. I once hoped that he would have been my brother in name, as in regard : but since that cannot be, I must bespeak a sister’s feeling on a double plea. I cannot believe that we are strangers, though I will not assert that we ever met before.”

“ You have long possessed my esteem from report, Sir Charles ; and Walter Gordon’s friend must be ours.”

“ I thank you, Miss Lyle : and now in pity, or in sympathy, forward my suit by introducing me to Lord Aggenthorpe and giving me a good character. I am half afraid to encounter his superb lordship, but will brave the danger for his fair daughter’s sake. Here are

my credentials," presenting a letter from Lady Emma to Florence. Florence was delighted that her friend would become the wife of Wal-ter's friend—of one of whom she entertained so high an opinion ; and as the baronet, though only a baronet, was of ancient family, large un-encumbered property, and unimpeachable character ; and moreover Emma's choice, who was her father's favourite, she anticipated that for once, " The course of true love would run smooth." In pity to the lover's impatience, without waiting her father's return, which would of necessity be late, she introduced the baronet at Aggenthorpe Castle, and had the pleasure of seeing him most graciously re-ceived, partly on account of his own gentle-manly and lively manners, partly on account of the reports from Emma and others, which had preceded his arrival.

Nor was the earl inclined to frown on his suit ; particularly when, after a plain state-ment of the small fortune which he could give

his daughter, Sir Charles declared with a warmth and frankness which could neither be doubted nor fail to procure him favour in a father's eyes, that he loved his Emma for herself alone ; offering such handsome settlements, that the earl was inclined rather to moderate than increase them.

So wild was the baronet's delight at the result of his visit, that the laughing Florence threatened to withdraw her certificate of good character, and report him as light and unsteady ; whilst her father, on his return, talked of giving Gordon a hint to be on his guard, lest his friend should supplant him with Florence.

Sir Charles only laughed at their threats, and declared his intention of remaining with them till Gordon's return, that he might be present to defend himself. Florence protested against such a punishment for her threat ; and Mr. Lyle forgot half his anxiety in listening to the playful sparring of his child and guest.

“ I leave you and Florence, Sir Charles, to settle your quarrels as you best can ; or call in Gordon and Lady Emma as moderators : but I must thank you for your generous offer of a loan, made through your friend. I know it was from regard for him ; but I am not the less grateful. I only fear that you were not then aware of all my difficulties, and may now in prudence wish to withdraw your offer. Of course, you are at perfect liberty to do so.”

“ I admit that the offer was made to please Gordon : I have known him from childhood—you only a short time,—and I had a half spite against your daughter for steeling Gordon’s heart against my sister’s charms : so that, in fact, you owe me no gratitude, particularly as Walter, though deeply interested in your welfare, considered it a point of honour not to offer the fifty thousand unless he thought its future repayment almost certain. At the present moment I require neither principal nor interest ; the profit it yields is very trifling, so

Gordon shall not be too scrupulous, and I hope you may find it serviceable : he recovered nearly as much for me some months since by looking into my affairs,—for I am ashamed to say that I am sadly negligent."

" But the twenty thousand, Sir Charles, advanced without question or security ?"

" That is Gordon's own, or will be. When he makes a handsome offer in another's name, depend upon it that the praise is due to him."

" Impossible ! this is only to prevent my thanks. Where could Gordon have procured the money ?"

" That is his concern, not mine. He asked me to lend it to him, knowing that I could and would let him have it on the instant ; but he insisted on giving me a bond for the repayment ; and I believe he even made some arrangement concerning it in case of any accident to himself. You still look doubtful : on my honour, I tell you the truth."

Mr. Lyle was puzzled.

"I remember now, that when I was regretting not being able to give Florence the fortune I had intended, he did say something about being richer than I supposed; but I asked no questions. Do you really know nothing of this increase of fortune?"

"Not I: he seemed shy of my congratulations, so I did not question him, lest he should fancy I was doubtful of repayment."

"Strange!" remarked Mr. Lyle.

The day after the receipt of Shaw's confession, a copy of it was sent to Lord Clanellon, with a few lines from Florence, simply stating that the enclosed would justify the breaking off all engagement between them. Mr. Lyle wished to write, and Gordon looked a fancy for the task; but, knowing his lordship's temper, Florence by pleading and firmness carried her point, declaring her female dignity required that she alone should give him his dismissal. Mr. Lyle, however, wrote to Lord Brackenbury, declining the intended alliance, and referring him to his son for the reason.

No notice was taken of either communication, and the only proofs of their having been received were the non-appearance of Clanellon, and the arrival some days after of two very polite letters from the heads of the houses who had promised aid, in which they expressed great regret that, from the increasing distress, &c., &c., they should not be able to assist Mr. Lyle, as they had before hoped and intended.

“All things tend to my fall,” thought Mr. Lyle as he laid down the letters. “Two foreign houses gone to-day, with which I have had large transactions, and by whose failure I shall suffer great loss; exaggerated reports of my misfortunes spreading widely, and demands pouring in on every side! The return of Gordon and Walton must decide my fate.”

Evil was the news which the merchant had to communicate on his return to Atherton to his daughter and Sir Charles, from whom he had no concealments. In the love and fortitude of Florence he found consolation and support;

and the baronet in the warmest manner tendered his services in any way, requesting Mr. Lyle to regard him as a second Gordon,—as willing, though not as capable.

“ Better not wait for his return ; let me advance the money at once, to meet the most pressing demands ; and employ me as you think I can best serve you. I am tired of quarrelling with your daughter, for she forgets an affront the next moment, so my work is never done ; and as my lady love forbade me to join her, and will not reach Aggenthorpe for some days, I am an idle man :—it will be a charity to find me occupation.”

The father and the child looked the thanks which they could not speak. Then there were still some hopes of withstanding the shock,—ere night had closed those hopes were gone.

The horror-stricken Walton returned from town with the intelligence that nearly all the sums considered so securely lodged had been withdrawn by Sawyer a short time before ; the

papers which the clerk had taken with him being, some, forgeries—some, useless duplicates.

No wonder that Sawyer had fled without risking another interview, or even a short delay. By concealing this worst villany, he had forfeited all claim to the promised immunity ; and as a strict examination of the papers or an application for the money must expose him, prudence counselled as speedy a renewal of flight as possible. How or when he had obtained possession of the real papers and substituted the false ones, as Mr. Lyle always kept the key of the *escritoir*, was never known ; for the wretched man in his haste to gain an obscure village on the coast, instead of going round, attempted a dangerous ford. His horse swam to shore—but the rider perished ! The body was taken out of the river a few days after, and identified by some letters found upon it. As little was known of the uses to which he had applied the money thus withdrawn :—there was a mystery enveloping the disposal of his unholy

gains which no living being could make clear
—and the dead speak not !

Mr. Lyle felt the shock severely ; the more so, that as Gordon had warned him of the danger, a minute examination then might have enabled him to recover some part of the embezzled property,—though this was doubtful. The merchant sank back in his chair with a groan as the certainty of his ruin forced itself on his conviction ; but the gentle soothings of his child and the kind attentions of Sir Charles were not without their effect. The baronet again pressed his services ; and Walton—the too cautious Walton, who usually weighed every favourable and unfavourable argument till the moment for action had elapsed, for once forgetting his caution and hesitation, boldly and openly offered the savings of a whole life of industry, though aware of the impossibility of such a trifle staying the failure above an hour.

The merchant and his daughter, by a sym-

pathetic impulse, each took a hand of the embarrassed clerk, and expressed their thanks and admiration by broken words and glistening eyes. They felt the worth of such a triumph over his natural caution ; and Sir Charles was scarcely ashamed of the moisture which dimmed his own sight for a time. He acknowledged that he had been far outdone: he had only offered little out of much, with the natural warmth of youth ;— Walton had offered his all, triumphing over the natural cautiousness of age and timidity of character.

As nothing could be done that night, after warmly thanking both, Mr. Lyle retired with his daughter. It was late before Florence left him, and the tone in which he prayed a blessing on his kneeling child showed that the time had not been idly spent ; whilst in her, sympathy and veneration mingled with the love of former days.

Nor was it his child alone who felt this reverence,—all shared in some degree in the feel-

ing, though few could have well defined it. Sir Charles had feared to see him desponding and despairing; he met him calm, firm, resigned, and his morning salutation was still more respectful than that of the preceding day.

Poor Walton, who had not slept all night, and feared to raise his eyes lest they should read the melancholy truth which the lips must so soon announce, was amazed when he heard the merchant's clear and steady tones,—still more amazed when, venturing to look up, he saw neither horror nor despair—only a deep but calm and manly regret. His amazement gave place to admiration when he perceived that Mr. Lyle, who in prosperity had occasionally shown himself indolent, unstable, and ostentatious, was now in adversity, active, firm, and humble. Some pictures appear best in one light—some in another: some most excite our admiration in strong clear lights—some touch our hearts and win our praise in soft and shadowy dimness. And thus it is in characters. Some stand more boldly out in adversity, their

noblest qualities strengthened, developed, by the necessity which calls them forth,—qualities that had slept—perhaps been corroded, rusted, in the repose of prosperity ; whilst others, who have delighted observers in their harmony with a sunny life, shrink into littleness—dwindle into querulousness — when the storm rends away what had made their happiness. Common artists put no strong lights, or put them where they should not be ; their bounded minds cannot realise the quality of boldness—cannot rise to a noble and judicious daring. So common minds cannot rise above the perils that surround them ; they cannot exalt their thoughts above the petty vexations of every day—they feel no lofty daring stirring within them ; they sink beneath the trial—fall crushed beneath the blow. They may form one of a group in a picture—one of the common herd in real life ; but they are not formed for prominent figures : they may follow,—they cannot lead—they can give no strength to others, but may receive it from them.

Thus to some minds adversity is the greatest trial ; to others, prosperity. To maintain an even mind in both—a humble heart in one, a resigned one in the other ; neither to shrink from danger, nor burst into rebellion,—nor to slumber in ease, and become callous to the sufferings of others,—is the duty — the difficult duty of man,—the noblest sight this world affords. Can man do this in his own strength ? Let him trust to that, and he falls !

It was thus with Mr. Lyle. The ruined merchant of to-day, was a nobler being than the wealthy merchant of the year before. His noble qualities, that had slumbered unobserved, corroded by prosperity, burst into life and action in adversity. The anxious state of affairs for the last few weeks—the occurrences of the last few days—his self-humiliation, all had been stirring holier thoughts. His features mirrored his better mood. Those features, whose general expression was commonplace except when he looked on his child, were

now redeemed from that censure, elevated in expression by the heart's exaltation. There was a noble boldness — a manly fortitude and patient bearing, of which a common observer of former times would have believed his appearance incapable. We do not mean to say that Mr. Lyle was henceforth free from weakness and from error—he had much of both : we would only say that his heart was more spiritualised, and that, feeling his own feebleness, he sought for strength where abiding strength can alone be found. He did not regard his misfortune as a light one ; but he was prepared to endure it with fortitude.

There was no one felt this elevation more deeply than Florence. She moved about with a lofty yet noiseless step, as if waiting on one of superior worth: she approached him with greater reverence; she listened to his words as the young listen to the words of those who have long been the heart's or the mind's idols—the glory of their waking and their sleeping dreams.

" It is my intention, Walton, to declare to-day that our payments must for the present be suspended," said Mr. Lyle in a calm and decided tone. " I think this course most likely to secure my creditors from loss; and this must now be my first consideration: my own fate is determined."

" Impossible, sir !" exclaimed Walton with a start of horror, shaking like an aspen, for the worthy man had been so long connected with the house that its interests and its honour were his own—Mr. Lyle and his daughter first in his consideration. " Impossible ! Miss Florence, will not you speak ? We can yet go on—I am sure we can."

Florence looked at her father, and saw how the heart was wrung while the voice was steady. She went to him, took his hand in hers, looked on him with a gentle reverence as if proud to link her fate with his, and answered the old man in a lofty and confiding tone.

" No, Mr. Walton ! it is only for his child

to admire and emulate. My father makes the greatest sacrifice which a merchant can make, that others may not suffer. He would not resolve thus if he could in honour avoid it ; and I am prouder of my father as he is, than if he were the ruler of a realm."

Poor Walton turned away from the daughter's lofty look with a sigh, so deep, it was as the sigh of a broken heart. He saw opposition would be useless.

" I honour your high feeling, Mr. Lyle, as much as your daughter ; but do not decide rashly," said Sir Charles. " I have been too long Gordon's friend, not to be regarded as yours. What extent of assistance can save you this sacrifice ? If within my means, they are at your disposal. I make the offer in admiration, and in full reliance that you will hereafter repay the debt. To overcome all scruples, in better times you shall pay Jewish interest," he added with a smile.

Florence's look of gratitude might have

made Gordon jealous: it caused the blood to mount to the baronet's cheek — he felt his friendship was more than appreciated.

Mr. Lyle's words were brief; and the voice faltered in thanks which had been steady in resolve.

“ I thank you, Sir Charles, for your reliance on my honour still more than for your generous offer; but I will involve no more in my misfortune. I hope to retain reputation and friends, and my child's love, — I hope to pay all to the uttermost shilling; and if He who blessed the efforts of my father will bless mine, hereafter, I hope yet to win for myself and Florence a humble competence.”

Before Sir Charles could persuade or argue, Mr. Hulton entered the room.

The baronet assumed a careless air; and the cautious Walton, fearing lest a suspicion of the truth in the mind of a brother merchant should precipitate the evil he dreaded, tried to look happy and unconcerned: but he was so

little an adept in deception, that Sir Charles, ever alive to the ridiculous, notwithstanding his sincere sympathy with the Lyles, could not repress a smile at the attempt whose failure was absolutely ludicrous.

The father and his child changed neither look nor attitude as the visitor was announced ; and even when the former rose to welcome him his daughter's hand was still retained. Mr. Hulton saw that something painful had occurred, and his manner became yet more friendly and respectful.

“ I must beg Miss Lyle's pardon for breaking up the party,” he said after the customary salutations. “ I came to speak with Mr. Lyle on business.”

Mr. Lyle looked at his guest, who avoided his glance, and a faint glow came on his pale cheek.

“ Speak out, Mr. Hulton ! you will say nothing that is not friendly, and I have no secrets from any here.”

“But business is a dull subject for a young lady,” replied Mr. Hulton, still hesitating.

“My child will bear with patient fortitude the trials to which she is appointed: I look to her for support, not an excuse for weakness. I understand your kindness in this hesitation; but when I tell you that I have declared my resolution of suspending payment for a time at least, you will no longer feel any difficulty in speaking out.”

“Will you not consult with Mr. Hulton, sir?—perhaps something might yet be done!” exclaimed Walton, starting from his seat in unwonted excitement and activity.

“Yes, do not decide too hastily,” said Mr. Hulton, who had been startled at the resolution. “I was once in greater difficulties than you can possibly be in, as you well know,—a new house with no powerful friend. To your kind assistance, though the world knows it not—at your particular request, I am under Providence indebted for my present prosperity. You

must not deny me the pleasure of proving that I have not forgotten your kindness. Do not seek to turn me by talking of any risk. I should have been a bankrupt—my wife and children houseless but for you :—they feel as I do. I regret—deeply regret, that being only a partner, I cannot place all I have at your disposal ; but I can, with Mr. Milne's consent, offer such assistance as will, I hope, prevent the necessity of any painful decision. I only returned from the Continent yesterday morning, or should not have been thus late in my offer, though ignorant of the extent of your loss. You know, I always prefer written documents to *viva voce* statements, as being more clear and certain :—there are our joint proposals."

Mr. Lyle took the paper in silence with a grateful pressure of the hand that gave it. His features showed strong emotion as he read — his voice faltered as he answered ; but his resolution was confirmed rather than weakened, and poor Walton was in despair as he spoke.

“Mr. Hulton, you overrate my services in former times; but had they been as great as you assert, this would more than repay them. The offer is handsome—generous—too generous to be accepted: besides, it was made in ignorance of the extent of my difficulties, and Mr. Milne is a prudent and a timid man. No, Mr. Hulton, I will involve no other in my misfortune; I cannot in honour allow those whose generosity has made a glory of my fall to risk anything for me. I have here two advantageous offers of connexion and consignment which must be accepted or declined to-day: to close with them as I am would be dishonourable—to decline them without a reason must speak me a madman—to declare my reasons must proclaim my ruin. The latter is the open, honourable course, and must be pursued; but I hope my openness will entitle me to substitute Hulton for Lyle. I see you would still persuade, though you feel the justice of my remarks, and would in my case act

as I do: your persuasions, as matters now stand, will be useless. I do not yield the struggle for fortune from weakness or indolence. If I could with a reasonable hope of success and in justice to others prolong the struggle, I should think it wrong to yield; but there is no such hope, and I submit. I have through life been prosperous—highly favoured in my ways; I have attributed too much to my own exertions—I have made an idol of my wealth. The pomp with which I have surrounded myself now seems armed with reproaches:—my child did not seek it, yet I forced it on her. I said to myself, that I did so in my love—now I feel that I did it in my pride and vanity. I did not know how much I prized this pageantry till now that I must give it up. But let it pass—though I shall feel its loss at first, I have still my child and my child's love, my honour and kind friends; these, I trust, will not be taken from me. I too have a paper; and you will see by this statement of my affairs, that under

the present aspect of mercantile concerns, my only chance of saving those connected with me from loss is an immediate suspension of payment. If allowed time, which I hope I may expect from my whole course of conduct, all will be paid ; and perhaps, unless the general panic should increase, a little may remain for Florence. Much must depend on the terms obtained for Atherton, and the time afforded me to make arrangements. I think you will admit that I have balanced all things fairly."

Mr. Hulton took the paper and turned to the window to read it.—Sir Charles looked out upon the lawn, but saw nothing ;—Walton scrawled figures on a sheet of paper with a most marvellous confusion of all the rules of arithmetic, which he crumpled up and carried off for shame when he saw that some had been blotted by a tear. Florence regarded her father with increasing pride.

" You see the case as I do, Mr. Hulton, by your silence ; you would act as I propose," said Mr. Lyle firmly though sadly.

"I certainly was not aware that Mr. Sawyer had so materially injured you. Has he been pursued? Something might—"

"All has been recovered from him that can be. Let him go! I would not—"

"I understand," said Mr. Hulton, seeing he hesitated. "We think alike: but your honour, talents and experience are still highly considered; if other friends—"

"I am ready and anxious," said Sir Charles, advancing.

"And the little I have," added Walton.

"Again I thank you!" replied Mr. Lyle, much affected; "but you cannot change me: this very generosity renders me immovable. Mr. Hulton, I see, approves of my decision, though speaking faintly against it."

"Mr. Sibthorp, sir, wishes particularly to speak with you alone," said a servant entering at the moment.

Mr. Lyle felt his trials were but begun. Mr. Sibthorp was a creditor, though to a very small

amount ; and, totally destitute of feeling and delicacy, his calculating coldness would deeply gall a generous spirit already writhing under a recent and heavy misfortune. He knew Sibthorp had always envied and denied him the honour of being considered the first merchant in Fairport, and now his own conscience whispered that he had not himself been quite free from the spirit of rivalry. As the trial must be encountered, he would strive to meet it as he should.

“ Show Mr. Sibthorp into my room, and say I will come immediately.”

“ Suppose you let me see him first,” said Mr. Hulton. “ Why should you be disturbed unless the business is really important ?”

“ I feel your kindness, Mr. Hulton ; but this is no moment to shrink from a task, however painful. If I have thought too much of his coarseness and ill-will in former times ; perhaps the painful disclosure which I have now to make may be considered some little expiation. I should suspect myself when I feel that I would

rather tell it to the whole world than to Mr. Sibthorp ; but he must even be consulted, for I owe him two hundred pounds.

“ I still wish you would allow me to see him first. I fear my intelligence will pain you, yet I think you would rather hear it from me than him, though your noble fortitude makes me ashamed to doubt your bearing any trial.”

“ Speak !” said Mr. Lyle in a low voice.

“ I believe it is Mr. Sibthorp’s wish to purchase Atherton.”

“ Mr. Sibthorp purchase Atherton ! He rule where my gentle child has ruled !—he own what she has beautified !—he change what she has loved !—He revel in these splendid rooms, with thoughts but of the dross of earth, where she has moved, giving a richer beauty to the brightness around her by her lofty loveliness—endowing the imaginings of art with all the power of thought and eloquence ! Is he to be master here ?—to load the already rich with a vulgar weight of gold ?—to count the worth of the canvass, glowing with life and thought, by

the splendour of its gilding—those pictures that my child chose and loved to look upon?" his regard turning as he spoke on one an especial favourite with Florence. "I saw him when last here count their value with a longing and a Jewish eye. This is indeed a trial! Can no other purchaser be found?"

None heard this burst of anguish without emotion. Before, and now, that was most prized which his child loved; and the regret of the proud merchant was secondary to the regret of the fond father, shocked that coarseness should profane what had been hallowed by his daughter's love. The others were silent from sympathy; his child bent fondly over him, and pressed his cold damp brow with her own pale lips.

"Do not let such thoughts grieve you, my dearest father: these things had but my admiration—you alone had my love. Let me but see you smile, and I will not shed one tear for the loss of all."

“ Bless you, my child !” said the father, passing his arm round his daughter’s neck and kissing away a tear in utter unconsciousness of the presence of others. “ I am weak, Florence ;—you must support me. I beg your pardon, gentlemen,” he added, colouring ; “ for a moment I forgot your presence.”

“ There requires no excuse,” said Mr. Hulton with glistening eyes : “ I too am a parent. May Jane resemble your daughter ! and should the like happen to me, may I bear it as firmly as her father ! We have all need to be watchful, lest we love the things of earth too much. I will put off Mr. Sibthorp : I should regret his possession of Atherton almost as much as yourself.”

“ No,” said Mr. Lyle, regaining his former firmness. “ This must not be, and I blush for my vehemence. I owe it to my creditors to sell it to the greatest advantage, and will thank you to do what will be best for them.”

Mr. Hulton had scarcely left the room when

Lord Aggenthorpe entered. He was never denied, or, if he had been, the intended connexion with Sir Charles would have ensured his admittance now; but it was not for Sir Charles that this visit was intended.

“ I fear I am intruding at this early hour; but having heard you were unwell, I came to learn the truth,” said the proud earl as if he had been addressing a brother earl.

“ Well in bodily health, my lord; but if I guess aright you have heard other reports, and are come as a friend to sympathise. Is it not so?”

“ I have! May I hope they are untrue?”

“ I am a ruined man, my lord,” said the merchant with the calmness of a subdued spirit.

“ I am grieved—truly grieved!” replied his lordship, bowing with a respect and shaking hands with a warmth he had never vouchsafed to the rich and prosperous Mr. Lyle.

Few would have imagined or believed that

the haughty Earl of Aggenthorpe would have thus stood before a ruined merchant. There was not a trace of pride in look or tone: it was all sincere, cordial sympathy—a noble though proud spirit paying that attention to the honourable in adversity which his pride had prevented his paying to him in prosperity. The truth was, few knew his lordship. We will not defend his pride—it was indefensible; let those blame him harshly who are wholly free from the error, if such can be found or such would do it; but it was in his case the besetting sin of an otherwise kind and generous heart. Birth, education, circumstance, had combined to cherish it; but it was distinct from, opposed to, envy, meanness, or oppression.

Galled, tortured, as he had been from his birth by the conflicts between his pride and poverty, he had scarcely ever regretted so keenly as at the present moment the want of wealth, which prevented his returning the obligation conferred on himself some time before. Nor

did this feeling arise from arrogance which could not brook to be indebted. The failure of some merchants, the tottering credit of others, had awakened serious thoughts. He could not hear of the suffering of others, traders though they were, unmoved. If riches made themselves wings and flew away, as he saw they did, why should his heart be set so devotedly upon them? They were a blessing to be laboured for industriously, received with thankfulness, enjoyed with moderation, accounted for as talents—not to be pined for in fretful pride.

The report of Mr. Lyle's failure (it is marvellous how things are reported before they occur) touched him more nearly; as bringing more clearly and pointedly before him the insecurity of wealth. He thought of the last dinner at Atherton—of its almost regal splendour; he thought too of Mr. Lyle's amiable character, his honourable dealings, his generous friendship, his affection for his noble child; he

thought of his suffering, and the suffering of that daughter; and the Earl of Aggenthorpe stood before the ruined merchant a better, because a humbler, man.

“Would to Heaven, Mr. Lyle, that I could offer anything which might avail! You know my scanty means; but I have influence with the head of one of the first houses in town: I was once of essential service to him, and can command his aid.”

“All assistance would be too late; but I do not feel your friendship the less,” replied Mr. Lyle, repeating all that he had before stated to Mr. Hulton. The earl listened in sincere sorrow, and said all that the most friendly could say to him and to Florence, promising that Emma should come over to the latter immediately on her arrival.

When Mr. Hulton returned from his mission, he looked flushed, and partly triumphant, partly vexed.

“What have you done?” asked Mr. Lyle.

“The earl will excuse our discussing business.”

“I have forced him to tolerable terms, but you are not obliged to accept them. It certainly is little short of profanation for such a gross, coarse-minded creature to possess Atherton; but if you could get over that, I think it might save you from a still more painful proceeding.”

“I will do what is best for others,” said Mr. Lyle. “What does he offer?”

“First let me tell you the terms. You need not quit Atherton under six months:—he to take the furniture at a valuation. The pictures in Miss Lyle’s boudoir—I knew they were especial favourites—and the family portraits, to be yours; the remainder between you and him, and the division to be thus: you to choose six, then he six; and the rest, one by one. I thought the six would save any you particularly prized; and that after that, your tastes would be little likely to clash, as he is to choose

for himself within three days against you or any one whom you may appoint :—the finest framed and largest pictures will win his favour. He insisted on having the paintings, and would not take them at a valuation. I have also secured specimens of all the plants, and a reservation of any articles which Miss Lyle may wish to retain. This is his offer,” giving a paper, “ the money to be paid down within the week if you require it, or as soon after as you please. I took care to have the offer under his own hand, as he holds wisdom to consist in overreaching.”

Mr. Lyle was in wonder. “ Can this be true ? Does the money-making, money-loving Mr. Sibthorp, offer such a sum in these present times, when he might take advantage of my distress ? ”

“ I am proud of your wonder,” remarked Mr. Hulton, “ and rather pique myself on my diplomacy. The man will publish that I wished for it myself, and that he outbid me ; but neither you nor I shall heed the report. His little mind, if he has such a thing, is set on

having the largest house and estate in the neighbourhood ; and as he only suspected your distress, instead of knowing it, I took advantage of his eagerness. Will not this induce a change in your decision ? I could plead but tamely before, as I honoured your resolve ; but now I can speak strongly. With this sum —what you expect from Paris—the assistance which Mr. Milne and myself will so readily afford—and that offered you by others—I not only think you justified in going on, but required to do so, for your own sake and your daughter's. Indeed you should not hesitate !”

“ No ! no ! you must not hesitate !” exclaimed the earl, the baronet, and the clerk, in harmonious chorus—such a chorus as never had been before, as never could be again,—so novel, so extraordinary, that Walton shrunk back alarmed when he observed that, in his energy, he had sprung to a station beside the haughty earl, and remembered that he had uttered such decided words, in such a decided voice.

“ Come, sir, you must yield, were it only for the sake of Miss Lyle and my friend Gordon,” urged the baronet with friendly warmth. “ I place myself and what is of more value at your disposal: Miss Lyle must make my peace with Lady Emma, should I be absent on her return.”

“ Emma will require no apology for service rendered to her friend’s father; and I shall consider it a personal favour,” said the earl, pleased with his future son-in-law’s warmth.

“ This is too much! you overpower me!” faltered Mr. Lyle, drooping his face for a moment on his daughter’s shoulder to conceal his emotion.

“ It is not too much! we do but show our regard for honour and integrity!” said Mr. Hulton. “ You consent to our wishes?”

“ I still fear to involve such generous friends.”

“ We consider it no risk; and you must not

break Mr. Walton's heart by refusing. Come, Miss Lyle, join your entreaties."

"They are needless: my father is himself again."

She was right: Mr. Lyle was himself again; what he had been in his younger days—no longer doubting, but ready for action. He repressed his annoyance at Sibthorp's possessing Atherton, and thanked his friends with the ardour of a strong and grateful mind. His receiving favours instead of bestowing them was a strange, but not a painful feeling.

"Sibthorp's having Atherton must be unpleasant," said Mr. Hulton; "but——"

"Do not shame me by the remark," replied Mr. Lyle: "I blush to have indulged in such a feeling. Coarse and indelicate as the man is, I fear I have not been humbled sufficiently, or I should only have been thankful for the opportunity. Great as has been the agony of the last few hours, it is repaid by such noble proofs of friendship. I am proud—very proud

of such friends ; and should our house by the blessing of Heaven prosper again, its prosperity will be dearer to me from the remembrance of this hour."

It was no time for delay. Walton set off immediately for Fairport with a speed which the cautious clerk had rarely used before, to be in the way to answer inquiries, and announce Mr. Lyle's instant arrival. An agreement having been signed by Mr. Sibthorp, and some other arrangements completed, that gentleman departed, insisting on making his purchase public.

The remainder of the party were consulting on the best methods of meeting difficulties, and silencing reports, which were so numerous and mischievous as to give the idea of their having been spread for some private and sinister purpose, when the servant again entered, saying that Mr. Ashton wished to speak with Mr. Lyle in private on business admitting of no delay.

The daughter's face brightened—the father's clouded.

"Foes as well as friends seem crowding round me," observed Mr. Lyle involuntarily: then added, "Say I am particularly engaged, and shall be obliged to Mr. Ashton to fix some other time."

"Will you not see him, my dear father?" said Florence earnestly, thinking of his ring and pledge. "He comes as a friend, you may rest assured."

"I doubt it," replied Mr. Lyle, a little impatiently; "but since you wish it, I will see him. Show him into my room, and say I will join him presently."

"Why should you doubt his coming as a friend?" asked Sir Charles.

"Because he has been rude from the first hour of our meeting; but as he appeared to appreciate Florence, I forgave him. Still we were not intimate."

"For Gordon's sake he would not come at such a time for trifling or impertinence."

"For Gordon's sake? I was not aware he knew him."

"Can you be ignorant that Gordon dragged him from the surf on the Chesil Beach at the hazard of his own life, when the vessel in which he returned from India was wrecked off Portland and every other creature lost?"

"This is perfectly new to me. Did you hear it, Florence?"

"No: I never even heard him name Mr. Ashton."

"That is just like Gordon—he never trumpets his own good deeds," exclaimed the baronet. "He snuffed a storm as animals do, and would go to the beach though I talked prudence; and in spite of the remonstrances of a daring but wary Portlander, would dash into the surf after a body driving inland. But for the Portlander and his dog, who pulled him and the body on shore and were handsomely rewarded by the old gentleman, he might have perished for his humanity. The marvellous

tale is told to all strangers who choose to listen."

"Singular!" murmured Mr. Lyle, his mind recurring to the past till he forgot he was not alone; "father and son both to save those who would otherwise have perished in the waters! His father saved my brother and myself, when the ice broke, and we hung over a deep hole, clinging for our lives to a frail branch. There was no help for miles, and, boy as he was, he risked his life for us. And Edward! poor Edward! he said I was the weakest, and should be saved the first; and yet Gordon loved him best! Better for Edward that I had died—he might then have been happy. Poor Edward!"

"Mr. Ashton is waiting; will you not go to him?" said Florence softly, perceiving he had forgotten the present in the recollection of the past.

"Yes, my child," he replied, starting from his reverie. "It is strange that Gordon should

not have named him," he murmured as he left the room.

"I was not aware of Mr. Lyle having a brother," remarked Lord Aggenthorpe.

"His mother was a widow with one son when my grandfather married her. A cousin, since dead, sowed dissension between the half-brothers for his own selfish ends, and my uncle Edward left the country in a sudden disgust. The vessel in which he sailed for the East was wrecked near a desert island, and only two of those on board saved, who were taken off soon after by a homeward-bound ship. My uncle's death was truly mourned, and my father never names him without a sigh."

"Edward Wensley was his name, was it not?" asked Mr. Hulton. "I remember hearing a schoolfellow describe him as brave and generous, but impetuous to a degree."

"That was his name, and, I believe, his character," said Florence.

CHAPTER VII.

“ Now heed, and I will tell a tale
Might make the sternest bosom quail ;—
A tale of hardship and of wrong—
Of hate, as lasting and as strong.”

“ I know you now ! that name, that tone,
Have made the long-hid secret known.”

MR. LYLE had suffered much for many previous days—his immediate presence was desirable at Fairport :—that Sibthorp would soon be master of Atherton struck him more painfully as he passed through the noble hall to his study—and the remembrance of Mr. Ashton's former conduct, with the conviction that he

came on no friendly errand, notwithstanding the remarks of Florence and Sir Charles, all combined to make him impatient at the request, and resolve that the interview should be as brief as possible. Then the silence of Gordon respecting their acquaintance! It was strange, and awakened an uneasiness for which he could not account. It seemed that this morning was to lay bare every hidden feeling—to subject him to every variety of trial. It had shown him his jealousy of Sibthorp; it now showed him his rivalry of the East Indian, and the dislike he had cherished, though concealing the feeling from himself and others. It was now no longer hid from himself at least. The Indian was still in prosperity—he in adversity; and he could not deny to himself that there was not another man in the whole world whom he would not rather have met at the present moment.

That he should like Mr. Ashton, was not possible; that gentleman's own manner for-

bade it : but why he shrunk from this meeting with a reluctance almost amounting to horror —why he always felt subdued and ill at ease in his presence, and had done so from their first meeting, was a mystery which he could not explain, yet a fact which he could not deny. Had Mr. Lyle been an imaginative man, he might have fancied that they had been deadly foes in some prior state of existence, and that some vague remembrance of their former feud still lingered on his mind.

When a person is hurried—anxious to be in action—a little irritated by recent thoughts and occurrences—allowed no time to subdue the irritation, but called on to meet at the instant a disliked and half-feared guest suspected of coming to triumph, the manner is likely to be rather abrupt and sharp, from impatience at the annoyance and a wish to appear at ease. Thus it was with Mr. Lyle, and he met his unwelcome visitor with a quick manner totally at variance with his usual frank and equitable temper.

“ Good morning, Mr. Ashton ! I am sorry to have detained you ; but I have been much engaged this morning ; and as my presence is required in Fairport as soon as possible, I hope you will excuse me if I press you to state at once the important business on which you desired to see me,—or perhaps you would defer it till I could pay more attention to your wishes ? This is an active and anxious time for merchants.”

“ I know it — a season of doubt and difficulty to many ; but surely none to the wealthy, the prudent, the active Mr. Lyle !” replied his visitor, with an abruptness equal to his own, and a tone that showed he was not speaking *de bonne foi*. “ Since you desire it, I will be brief : it would be a want of courtesy after your request to waste time in unmeaning etiquette.”

Mr. Lyle bowed in acquiescence, though evidently annoyed, and the gentlemen sat down ; Mr. Ashton so seating himself, that, whilst the light fell full on his companion’s

face, his own, being from the window, was in shadow; but, though some of the features were obscured, the eye gleamed with an unfriendly brightness, and the voice was cold and stern, or impetuous,—rushing, as it were, through the compressed lips, as if bursting the control that would have softened or withheld them.

“ I come to claim ten thousand pounds left to Edward Wensley by his uncle.”

Mr. Lyle started at the name in considerable agitation; but, after a minute, answered politely though coldly.

“ By what right, Mr. Ashton, do you make this claim? My poor brother has been dead for many years; and the money was to devolve to me in case of his demise without children, under the age of thirty. Both these chances have occurred.”

“ We are apt to believe what we wish; but fate does not always run as we desire,” replied Mr. Ashton bitterly. “ Mr. Wensley did not die before he was thirty, and was thus entitled

to make a will, which he did in favour of Edward Ashton. For many reasons I should imagine that you would not deem it prudent to dispute the instrument."

" I am not in the habit of disputing lawful claims, Mr. Ashton; but it is my custom to examine documents before a payment of demands; and I know no reason why, if I believe your demand unjust, I should shrink from disputing it. Pardon my plainness, but your manner is unfriendly, and ever has been. Convince me of the justice of your claim, and it shall be paid; but I think you must have been deceived. I have many proofs that my unfortunate brother perished at sea before his thirtieth year."

Mr. Ashton looked at him for a moment in silence as if surprised at his boldness, and then answered with a sternness that was fearful—the sternness of suppressed rage, to which he dared not yield.

" Edward Wensley did not perish at sea,

however much his friends might have desired it. You ask for proof,—here it is,” unfolding a paper, and showing a will signed Edward Wensley, properly witnessed, and dated from Guzerat some years after his supposed decease.

Mr. Lyle ran eagerly over its contents; but little of the meaning seemed to rest on his mind, save the fact that his brother had not died as supposed. The signature could not be doubted, and Mr. Lyle was so much moved at the characters, that the fact of having been called on to pay money appeared to have totally escaped his memory.

“ Poor Edward ! And he never knew how he was mourned—never heard of our inquiries !” he said in a low voice.

A bitter and scornful laugh burst from Ashton, who had heard his words, but could not see his face, concealed by the paper. Mr. Lyle looked up, and the indignant blood rushed to his temples as he met his visitor's contemptuous glance. He turned aside, dashed

away a tear, and struggling for composure, answered his observer calmly and proudly.

“ As my guest, Mr. Ashton, I am willing to pass over much that is uncourteous—sympathy I never expected ; but you will not deny me the details that are to establish your claim, though you show no tenderness for a brother’s feelings. Tell me how Edward escaped from shipwreck ? why he never wrote ?” here his voice faltered, “ and when he died ?—in short, tell me all ! I would hear everything ! Would that I could recall him to life !” he added with much emotion.

Mr. Ashton’s gaze grew fiercer — his tone more bitter, after a doubtful look. He showed no pity for the brother’s emotion.

“ You say you would hear all ! Can you bear the recital ? All ! even from his childish days ?”

“ Yes, yes ! I can bear all ! only tell me he did not die with hatred in his heart, a curse upon his lips ?” and the brother, forgetting all

but his sorrow, looked anxiously up in the face of the scorner.

Mr. Ashton shook at the appeal ; his sternness gave way, though he tried to retain it ; and he answered more gently.

“ Edward Wensley did not die with hatred in his heart — a curse upon his lip !”

“ Thank Heaven !” exclaimed Mr. Lyle, covering his face with his hands. It has ever grieved me that he might have done so. Now tell me all — every particular — I can bear all now !”

“ You are a bold man, Mr. Lyle !” replied Ashton with his former sternness ; “ but a brave spirit hears a fearful tale with an uncovered face.”

Mr. Lyle withdrew his hands.

“ I forgive these cruel insults, for the kindness which this paper says you showed my brother ; but for the future forbear—they are unmanly and unchristian: you should respect a brother’s grief !”

"I feel for a brother's wrongs!" retorted Ashton fiercely.

"I do not deny that Edward was wronged, but not as he thought," replied Mr. Lyle. "You engaged to tell me all—I call on you to fulfil the engagement."

"I will: but remember the demand is yours;—I am not answerable for its effect. I will begin from his boyhood, and will not be stayed. I will say what he said on his dying bed:—if the guilty tremble, it is not my doing!"

"Speak! I fear not!"

"So be it then!"

Mr. Ashton had no longer the will or the power to restrain his violence: his words burst from him with the force of a cataract; his gleaming eye was never off the face of his hearer—he would gloat on the pain his words inflicted—whilst his listener seemed fascinated by the deadly gaze, and unable to turn aside.

"Mrs. Wensley was left a widow—a poor widow, with one boy. In her distress she ap-

plied to Mr. Lyle, the wealthy merchant, who had known her husband. He spoke kindly to herself and to her child, and the desolate widow's heart was touched. He was rich—he promised to become a father to her boy—he was but a step-father ! The widow became a wife; and the wife again became a mother; and Edward Wensley was to give place in all things to Robert Lyle. Why should he not ? He was a beggar and a step-son ; Robert Lyle was a son—an only son—the heir of wealth—a petted plaything from his birth ! He could claim fortune, education—as his right, Edward Wensley, only as a bounty—a favour, to be repaid by passive obedience—by cringing to the young self-willed heir. The tempers of the half-brothers did not assimilate : there was no sympathy between them—they were ever at variance :—the youngest desired homage, the oldest would not pay it. All wrong done by both was laid on the elder—it was his doing or his persuading. He rushed to action to save him-

self from thought ;—his daring spirit ever led him into peril, and he was ever in disgrace. The elder complained : the step-father was wroth—the mother silent ; the younger born was her favourite—the child of her hopes and love. For the elder none hoped—none loved him—at least, none of his race. He stood almost alone : but one defended—but one sought him—Walter Gordon,—the noblest heart that ever beat ! He was neglected, frowned on, taunted ; but he had one moment of redeeming triumph. Walter Gordon and the brothers were skating on a lonely pond, no other human being within miles. The ice broke over a deep hollow ; the younger would have sunk, but the elder supported him till he could clutch an overhanging bough. Walter Gordon, with greater strength and thought, contrived the means to save them ; but it could be only one at a time. Edward was his favourite, and he would have first secured his safety ; but Robert, younger, less robust, was sinking—his hold failing—one

moment of delay, and Edward had been freed from a rival and a persecutor. He refused safety to himself till that rival was freed from danger!—It was a glorious moment! The younger professed gratitude:—it was a cold, inactive gratitude.

“ The boys were separated for some time, it was said for the advantage of the elder. When they met again, they were men;—at least, as such did they consider themselves. Time had changed their stature, but not their dispositions or their feelings. They no longer quarrelled as boys—they hated as men.

“ Mr. Lyle had a ward, young, rich, lovely!—how lovely! not the mere loveliness of form and feature, but the touching beauty,—the resistless witchery of the heart—the mighty spell of mind! In her presence vice shrunk back abashed—folly stood rebuked; it seemed as if nothing mean or vile could live beneath her eye.

“ Edward loved—passionately loved—loved with his whole soul, as only few can love!

Cast off by others, his life, his hopes, were centred all in her. Day by day the strong spell worked. He had no other thought—he lived but in her presence or on the memory of her words ; and he hoped—believed that the love of the lonely outcast was not contemned. He made no secret of his passion ; all must have known it—all must have seen it. He was compelled to depart for a time ; but the young heir remained to plot, to woo, to win. The elder one returned—returned full of hope and love ; he could at that moment have clasped his brother to his heart with a brother's feeling.

“ He met a cousin, one who had stood his friend before, and he questioned of her he sought. John Mitchel spoke not till strongly urged—it might be said compelled—and then reluctantly avowed that Robert Lyle was the successful wooer of Florence Tyrrel. Edward refused belief ; but it was too true ! Mitchel pointed to where they were. Edward Wensley rushed to the spot, and there knelt Robert Lyle before

Florence Tyrrel—his Florence, as he had hoped,—she bending towards him lacing a locket in his hands. Edward lingered an instant, then uttering an expression of wrath and contempt, turned and fled. Robert Lyle called him back to triumph in his misery ; but the outcast paused not—he dared not trust his anger, he dared not linger in the same land with his perfidious brother. Florence would not have lightly changed.

“ Edward now only thought of placing the greatest space between his wrath and its object. Distance and action were what he sought ; his native land was hateful, and he sailed for another. He was wrecked in the Hope, as stated, but, by swimming and drifting, reached a small island, some little distance from that on which the two seamen had been thrown, from whence, many months after, he was taken by a vessel bound for India. He had escaped the perils of the sea and the wearing pangs of famine—but he was alone in India, without means and

without friends. Strange that, wretched outcast as he was, he should still struggle for life!

“ He wrote to his mother ; but he asked for no assistance from her or his step-father, only requesting to have the interest of the money left him by his uncle transmitted to him.

“ No answer was returned. No—the runaway had deserved his fate ! He should have died as his shipmates had died ! Why should he survive for whom no one cared—a living reproach to the deceitful and the cold ? And ten thousand pounds was something even to the heir of hundreds of thousands.”

“ You wrong us ! the letter was never received,” exclaimed Mr. Lyle.

The speaker looked at him with scornful incredulity, and continued without further pause or reply. Mr. Lyle had before signified dissent by action, and attempted to speak ; but it was vain to attempt to check the torrent of his words—his rushing thoughts ;—as well think to stay the cataract with a hazel wand.

“ It matters not how the young man lived—how he struggled with his fate: he had borne the taunts of the wealthy and unfeeling—he had been inured to wrong; and sustained the warfare boldly, bravely. The lonely stranger had still one hope: he wished to see her whom he had loved once again before he died, or to rest beside her in the tomb! He would owe nothing to those who had thrown him off; he would prove his powers—he would win an independence: he had been slighted—he would triumph yet, and they should envy. The body's strength equalled not the mind's ambition. He was helpless on the bed of sickness—suffering, dying; his thoughts, his hopes, on other lands,—his heart longing in that fearful moment for a mother's look of love—a father's or a brother's whispered words of fondness. But these were not for him! a lonely life—an unlamented death, with bitter, and, alas! unhallowed thoughts! One alone sought and soothed him—Edward Ashton—and

to him he bequeathed his all. There were none else to bless him — none else who prized his blessing.

“ You have heard his story — you have seen his will. Does Mr. Lyle require more ? Will he deny belief ? will he refuse payment ? Or does he wish for a more detailed narrative ? ”

The speaker stopped abruptly, gazing fiercely on his agitated listener ; but the fierceness — the bitterness of the teller was forgotten in the anguish caused by the tale itself.

“ Poor Edward ! And did he die believing we had wronged him thus ? ” asked Mr. Lyle. “ You said before he did not die with hatred in his heart.”

Again was Mr. Ashton moved by the questioner’s evident emotion to more gentleness, though he seemed to scorn himself the while.

“ I told you truly.”

“ I thank you for the assurance : that, at least, is some consolation.”

"A poor one, if your present grief is sincere," remarked Mr. Ashton sarcastically.

"You wrong me by the doubt: my grief is sincere."

"You wronged Edward Wensley."

"I did; but not as you and he suppose."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Ashton with insulting credulity. "Of course then you will be anxious to prove your innocence of former wrong, or your wish to repair it by complying at once with your brother's last wishes."

"Mr. Ashton," said Mr. Lyle with recovered calmness but a flushed cheek, "I will do what an honourable man should do; but I will neither yield to insult nor menace. Why you should employ either to one who has done you no ill, particularly at this moment and in his own house, you can best tell: in charity, I will hope the motive to be such as you may avow without a blush.—There is another strange peculiarity in your conduct. Why was this will, made some years since, never presented

before? If you would excuse yourself by saying that you waited till your return to England, I reply, you have been in England many months. Why were your rights not asserted when I was revelling in riches? Why were they deferred till a moment of distress? Why did you never name my brother to me?"

" Do you mean to deny my claim—to refuse payment?—to shelter yourself by insinuating doubts of my honour?" demanded Mr. Ashton haughtily, yet, for the first time, looking down.

" I seek no shelter, Mr. Ashton: I stated my objections fairly and clearly; do you answer them as candidly. I cannot believe you capable of a dishonourable act even towards one whom you regard, I know not why, as a foe; but your conduct is to me inexplicable. I should have thought that common humanity and propriety would have induced you to write immediately on my poor brother's death."

Mr. Lyle spoke with a dignity his manner rarely exhibited, and Mr. Ashton showed he felt its power, by a more subdued tone and less bitter words; whilst something resembling confusion might have been traced by a more penetrating observer.

“ It was Edward Wensley’s own wish. Why inform those of his death who took no heed of the notice of his existence ? ”

“ I have already refuted the charge of neglect on that point. The letter was never received; and the more minute and anxious our inquiries, the clearer and stronger the confirmation of his death. His life would have blighted my fondest hopes,—those hopes, that, in after life, were more than realised; yet would I have yielded them and half my wealth beside to have restored him to life.”

Mr. Lyle paused for a moment to steady his faltering voice. Mr. Ashton made a sudden gesture of surprise, bent on him a glance beneath which a guilty heart must have quailed,

and then said in a hollow tone: " Go on ! Of what hopes do you speak ? "

" Of those dearest to my heart. To Mr. Ashton, the wealthy East Indian, whose bearing has been uncourteous from our first meeting —on the present occasion wounding and ungenerous, I would give no explanation ; but, as the friend of my lost and injured brother—as the soother of his last hours, I would offer some defence for my parents and myself. That Edward was wronged, I admit : but we knew it not till the death of Mitchel, who confessed it had been his work, from the first moment of his entrance into our family, to injure and estrange us from him in every possible way ; and Edward's high and impetuous, though generous spirit, but too well aided his endeavours. Mitchel, dependant on my father, feared a division of his bounty ; and we, unhappily, suspecting no deceit, were too easily deceived. It was indeed a moment of glory to Edward, when, at his own peril, he

saved the life of the brother he hated, and by whom he believed himself equally detested ; and I felt it so : but he wronged me in thinking my gratitude cold and inactive. I did not possess his passionate eloquence when moved ; but, at the moment, I loved—I admired him, and would have flung myself into his arms and said so ; but he repulsed me with an expression of aversion and a charge of hypocrisy. Mitchel heightened our mutual irritation. I did not know that Edward loved my father's ward—I once suspected it, but Mitchel solemnly assured me I was mistaken, and I too readily believed what I desired to be true : but had Edward returned at my call, he would then have been happy. I did not seek to triumph over him—I had no cause for triumph :—he had saved my life—I would have resigned to him what I loved more than life. I loved Florence Tyrrel as devotedly as himself. If my love did not appear as ardent as his, it was as sincere and lasting : the feeling was

equally strong in each, only modulated in its expression by the difference of temper. Had he returned, he had been blessed, and I had gone forth in sorrow. When Mitchel, for his own views, sent him to us, Florence was owning her regard for him, and urging me to be his friend. The locket he believed her bestowing on me, was one containing his own hair, which he had given to her long before: it had fallen during our agitating interview, and she was just taking it from, not placing it in my hands. Her murmured thanks, that maddened Edward, were for my promise of smoothing the difficulties which opposed his wishes. You look surprise and disbelief, Mr. Ashton—I only speak the simple truth."

"But you married Florence Tyrrel," remarked Mr. Ashton in a tone that made his companion start, and bend on him a keen and anxious look.

"Answer!" he added, resuming his sternness, and commanding obedience with a haugh-

ty, and impatient gesture; which Mr. Lyle obeyed, after a moment's hesitation.

“I did marry Florence Tyrrel, and was happy in her love; but not till years after Edward's fancied death. I respected her grief too much to intrude my suit again; I soothed, I mourned with her as a brother. My father, believing himself on his death-bed, and knowing, which his ward knew not, that her fortune was but small, entreated her to reward my affection; and Florence, won by my devotion and forbearance, gave me her hand, and, I may add, her love, though not exactly such as she had felt for Edward. The locket with his hair was buried with her, together with the ring which bound her faith to me. I regretted Edward's death sincerely, the more deeply when I learnt how much he had been wronged. If I love my child more fondly even than is usual with a father, it is because I trace in mind and features the resemblance to my lost Florence: my affection for the lamented mother increases my affection for her child.”

Mr. Lyle turned away to conceal his emotion. A convulsive sob roused him from the indulgence of his own grief—he looked at Ashton. His hands concealed his features, but large tears burst through his outspread fingers, and his body was rocking to and fro. Again was Mr. Lyle's look troubled and eager; he grasped his arm, speaking hurriedly and wildly.

“Who are you? Why do you weep?”

Mr. Ashton started—flung off his grasp and stood erect before his questioner, gazing on him with a burning eye.

“As you hope for Heaven, is all this true? Can you bring proof?”

Mr. Lyle walked to two covered portraits and withdrew their veils. The one represented a young and beautiful woman with a striking resemblance to Florence, but with a loftier mien and a look of chastened sorrow; the other, a young man, apparently a little older, with a countenance remarkable for fire and intelligence.

“ If Florence Tyrrel had not loved Edward Wensley,—if I had not loved both,—should I place them there side by side, my brother and my wife ! and yet not fear to look upon them ?”

Mr. Lyle spoke impressively, and his eyes were fixed on Mr. Ashton, who had crossed the room with hurried strides, and, after a glance at the portrait of the young man, was now contemplating that of the female. His whole frame shook—his hands were clenched—the cold dew stood on his lofty brow—the livid lip quivered—the whitened nostrils were extended ;—never was there a more striking picture of mental suffering — of the might of memory ! One only word was breathed—but that one word told all !

“ Florence !”

The heart’s secret was revealed ! If the dead could wake to life at a mortal’s call, the object of his early and unchanging affection had burst the tomb and stood before him. If

the call of love could have imparted life and being to the senseless canvass, the speaker had been answered!—But this could not be! The grave retained its dead—the work of art was mute!—but the living heard and answered.

“Edward! my brother!” and Mr. Lyle flung himself on his neck with a sudden burst of passionate love that could not have been expected from his usually tranquil manner.

Mr. Ashton could doubt no longer. “Yes, we are brothers! She shall be the bond between us!”

The embrace was warmly returned, and the tears of the long-estranged brothers mingled together for the first time.

When Mr. Lyle returned to the drawing-room, traces of his late motion were still discernible; but a bright smile was on his lip, as a sunbeam resting on a riven tomb!

Mr. Hulton had gone to Fairport to carry into effect some of the plans agreed on; but Florence and her two other visitors were anx-

iously expecting the termination of the interview.

“I know what you would ask, my child,” said her father as Florence looked eagerly in his face. “It is all well, and I have another blessing to be grateful for. In Mr. Ashton I have not only found a friend, but a long-lost brother. Go to him; he longs to demand your love, and chide you for not claiming the redemption of his pledge.”

CHAPTER VIII.

Non me resta più a dire una sola cosa degna di soddisfare la classe più indulgente dei lettori ; e terminando il mio racconto con un matrimonio, come verità di storia m' impone di fare, me metto fra la innumerevole schiera degli scrittori di novelle e di commedie, tra i quali a stento ne scerni uno che abbia saputo evitare un finale così triviale e meschino.

Il Proscritto.

MR. LYLE said truly : his brother proved himself a most efficient friend. The whole of his large fortune, partly acquired by his own talents and industry—partly through the bequest of the very Mr. Ashton who had watched beside him when erroneously supposed to be on his death-bed, and whose name, on his demise, he had since taken, was placed at the merchant's disposal. With all these resources, Mr. Lyle's

house was secure against every demand—provided against any shock ; and Gordon's return with a larger supply than could have been hoped gave Mr. Lyle the assistance of a willing and comprehensive mind.

Mr. Ashton has himself tolerably explained his feelings and views. Though there was something to condemn in both, yet let us judge him leniently. He had been wronged, though not as deeply as he imagined, and had believed himself abandoned by all. His love for Florence had outlived his youth—had survived the shocks of a busy and troubled life, and he had come to England to visit her grave, and, should her daughter resemble her, not only make her his heiress, but win her regard ; trusting, that time, his wounds, and some little intentional disguise, would prevent his being known. His will, made in Florence's favour, had been sent to England some time before ; and it was an accidental sight of that which had induced Clanellon to seek Mr. Ashton's favour, and ac-

counted for his supposed disinterestedness in still urging his suit to the daughter after the knowledge of her father's probable ruin.

His preservation by Walter Gordon, the son of his former friend, on the Chesil Beach, gave him another object of interest—another being to love; and the twenty thousand pounds which the young man had offered to advance in Sir Charles's name was to be repaid by what Mr. Ashton, claiming the privilege of his father's friend, insisted on settling on him,—a settlement only delayed on account of some intricacy in his Indian affairs. Nor was this all: Mr. Ashton decided, after a further acquaintance, on dividing his property at his death in equal portions between Walter and Florence; and when he guessed by questions and penetration that Gordon was attached to his niece, it became his first wish that they should be united.

For this purpose he settled in the neighbourhood of Fairport, and fixed on Ryeburns, as the place where Florence Tyrrel had resided before

and after her marriage, and on this account endeared to him, though also the scene of his early sorrows. Whilst admitting an interest in the family, he concealed his former name from Gordon, who, believing himself an object of dislike to Florence, refused all his invitations to Ryeburns. Mr. Ashton, on the contrary, suspecting Florence's real feelings, attributed her coldness to her father's selfish pride and vain longing for a titled son-in-law, and thus regarded his brother with still more unfavourable feelings than before their meeting. The little care he took to conceal these unfriendly feelings occasioned a restraint and coldness on Mr. Lyle's part which reacted so as to increase the estrangement between the brothers.

When he would reveal the relationship, or if at all, he had not decided, when he received a letter from Dunrayne, who had overheard his conversation with Florence, and suspecting that she would make no application for herself, and aware of his dislike to Clanellon,

acquainted him with every requisite particular, calling on him to come forward and save Florence from the fulfilment of her enforced engagement.

Here was an opportunity of wringing his brother's heart which he had not the generosity to resist ; hiding the want of Christian feeling which the desire betrayed, under the pretence that that brother required a painful lesson to induce him to relinquish his plans, and the resolve to assist him in the end. Illness prevented an earlier arrival, and his old will, that by some chance had not been destroyed, afforded the means of probing the heart whose thoughts he wished to read.

The pain he sought to inflict was returned with double force upon himself, joined to shame and regret, when he learnt that to his own impetuosity was he indebted for long years of suffering.

This suffering faded into a gentle sorrow : he looked on Florence as on a beloved daughter, on her father as an affectionate brother, on

Gordon as a son ; and each and all strove to obliterate the troubles of the past, by the gentle and self-denying love of the present.

The reports injurious to the credit of Mr. Lyle's house died away after the prompt payment of one or two demands ; and merchants again raised their heads and looked forward with hope.

“ How shall we convince Walton of our gratitude ? ” asked Mr. Lyle. “ We owe him much.”

“ There is one way,” said his daughter, hesitating.

“ I understand, Florence ; we must think about it.”

He not only thought of the hint, but acted on it, and proposed that Walton should become a partner in his house.

“ Prithee, Gordon, as they said in the good olden times—ay, even before baronets were, whither are flown all your beautiful dreams of—

‘ Both by precept and example showing,’
to what perfection the mind of man was capa-

ble of attaining?" asked the lively Sir Charles as the friends were standing together in the library at Atherton.

"To think of your simplicity in asking the history of a beautiful dream — whence it came, whither it has flown! — as if such evanescences could furnish subjects for publication, like the 'History of Goody Two Shoes.'"

"You certainly are incomparable, Walter, at getting out of a scrape or a folly; but I am not silenced yet."

"That would be an impossibility: I pity the Lady Emma!" said the laughing Gordon.

"Out upon you for a slanderer! When did I apostrophise the moon, or the spirit of the storm, that I might have all the talk to myself, as some have done? But I am not to be turned from my purpose. What is become of the beautiful star that was to be worshipped with such ethereal homage, such immaterial love — that was to elevate your thoughts,

spiritualise your mind, and illuminate your writings?"

"It is still beautiful!—unchanged in beauty and in power! worshipped as truly still—the guiding star of life."

"Vastly pretty! a tolerable conceit if you were talking to your mistress, but somewhat unintelligible to a plain matter-of-fact man like myself."

"I suspect you envy my eloquence, Charles, by your being so critical. Banish that cloud, and I will lend you the sentence for your Emma, promising never to tell her it was borrowed. I can make plenty more as good."

"Your cool impertinence 'flogs Asia,' as some author has it," replied the lively baronet. "Talking of authors,—in plain English, what is become of your passion for authorship?"

"Absorbed in another passion."

"About as intelligible as your former answer, or an ancient oracle. Those only speak vaguely who fear to commit themselves. Am

I to believe the Fairport Chronicle, which announces a new firm of Lyle, Gordon, and Walton?"

"Ask the latter, who always speaks promptly and decidedly, and who has, for the third time, begged for a further extension of the period for consideration."

"Well, well! To think of the wonders of this world! Walter Gordon the enthusiast—the would-be author and perfectionist—the immaterial adorer of an unattainable star—dwindled into a common-place merchant!"

"Slander and envy again! Walter Gordon will not be a common-place merchant."

"Oh! I cry his pardon. A merchant extraordinary!—a refiner!—an elevator of the whole *corps mercantil*! You begin with Sibthorp, of course, as a promising subject."

"No; I leave him as a specimen of what the corps was."

"As I said before, you are incomparable at getting out of a scrape or a folly. But, se-

riously, Gordon, how will your imagination and enthusiasm bow themselves to the dry realities of business?"

"I never asserted that I had either; but imagination and enthusiasm are not under due control if they prevent the mind from turning to any required subject, however dry or naturally unpalatable. I should not from my own choice have set up as a merchant,—unless, indeed, I could have persuaded you to become my partner: but Mr. Lyle had the plan so much at heart, though he neither urged it indelicately nor ungenerously, that I owed it to his kindness to make no objection. How else could I show my gratitude? And Florence, though she would not have wished it otherwise, on seeing her father's anxiety did look something very like a desire that I should consent. My name without my services will be enough in common times; so, in common times, Florence and I still intend to be a little intellectual;—though it is possible that, in deference to Mr. Lyle's opinion, I may never

assume the character of an author. Plenty of time to consider that matter yet. The imaginative part of authorship is delightful; the mechanical, drudgery: and I am sometimes inclined to make a little change in an old proverb and say, ‘Fools write books, and wise men read them.’ When I developed my former plans, I had no tie of affection—no prospect of the blessing of a happy home—no family duties—no means by wealth or station of benefiting those around me. Now I have all those! I move, as it were, in another and more extended sphere.”

“Capital! Go to Ireland, my dear fellow, and outblarney O’Connell, and cajole the *Re-palers*: — your talents are wasted here. It seems you must assist or perfect all within your reach! So you have translated your pet star into the new sky, and worship her as you did before. Well, I think I shall take to worshiping a pet star, you are so provokingly and vulgarly happy,—never favouring us with sub-

lime flights on the interesting, irremediable, unmitigable misery of human life. You and your fair one will make a very respectable couple at last."

"There can be no doubt of that, Charles. But are not you happy?"

"Perhaps, I ought to be; but I should be ashamed to own it with such unpoetical openness as you do. You have got rid of all your interesting alarms and anxieties."

"Yes, they are all absorbed in my happiness."

"What a confession for an intellectual lover! How unwise in the lady to let you rest in security! You will never be taken for a burker again, and are no more fit for the hero of a novel than I am for the heroine: not but that I should make a very lovely and interesting young lady;—I have not much of a beard, and I should be irresistibly sentimental. But the Fates and the Lady Emma have forbidden this!—By the way, Gordon, I cannot

see why we should not be married on the same day ; and that arrangement will quicken my rather particular papa-in-law, who seems inclined to keep me sometime on probation."

" *A propos des bottes*," said the laughing Gordon, whose happiness made him a match for his lively friend. " You are afraid that the cloven foot will be discovered, and I cannot in my conscience assist in shortening the probation :—besides, it cannot be !" he added very gravely.

" Why not ?" asked the impatient baronet.

" Because I know that Lady Emma has promised to be Miss Lyle's bridesmaid ; and she is too conscientious to break her word on any consideration."

" Wretch ! I now do full justice to the penetration of the good people of Weymouth :—you are a burker. Torture and murder are your favourite pastimes : Miss Lyle must be warned. I will appeal to the ladies : Emma is not so scrupulous."

"Emma is so scrupulous, and your appeal is rejected," said a soft voice near.

Sir Charles turned round, and there were Emma and her friend Florence looking most mischievously confusing.

"I recommend you, Sir Charles Cleveland, the next time you honour us by a mention, to be more courteous in your discourse; or first ascertain our absence, for I conclude you were not aware of our having been in the room for the last ten minutes. Lady Emma Dunrayne is so scrupulous—so particular in the discouragement of immorality, that she condemns you to a year's probation for having doubted her maintaining her word or performing her promise."

"I shall not believe that you will so slander yourself. To reject an appeal before it has been made, would be an un-English mode of proceeding; to condemn me unheard, without defence, to the greatest penalty of the law, would be beyond the law—the act of a barbarous

and cruel tyrant ; and tyranny and cruelty can never be associated with the gentle Emma. And am I to blame that I did not see you ? Should not the sun bear the blame if its worshippers are blinded by its glory ? ”

“ Vastly pretty ! and a tolerable conceit if you were talking to your mistress ; but a little unintelligible to a plain matter-of-fact person like myself. I might relent, but that I know you borrowed the simile of your friend, who has promised not to claim it.”

“ A second Daniel come to judgment ! ” exclaimed Gordon, all joining in the laugh against the baronet.

“ Unheard-of barbarity ! the cruelty of the Emperor Nicholas to the gallant Poles is nothing to this ! Then two to one ! ” said the culprit. “ I appeal to you, Miss Lyle—you were ever generous : plead my cause—give me a good character—become my surety.”

“ What ! do you imagine that Emma could not refuse the surety of such a respectable per-

son, Sir Charles? I might have been tempted by my excessive generosity to commit such an imprudence, had you not shown such a thorough contempt for respectable people," replied Florence, her musical laugh mingling with the gaiety of her companions.

"Thus runs the world!" philosophised Sir Charles. "I see dear, kind Mr. Lyle on the lawn; I will apply to him."

"If you do!" threatened the Lady Emma with an upraised finger.

"If I do not?" demanded her lover.

We have forgotten the lady's answer, or we never heard it; but we "calculate" that the gentleman had the wit to make his peace and gain his point. One thing is known,—that the marriage of the friends was fixed for the same day, Emma only insisting that Florence should take the vows first, that she might profit by her example.

"I am come back to be your bridegroom-man, Gordon!" said Lord Dunrayne, entering

the boudoir at Atherton abruptly and unannounced, as was his custom, taking a hand of Florence and her lover, and seating himself between them. "What reward may I claim for my magnanimity?"

Before his reward could be named, the door again opened, and an elegant girl entered the room with a dancing step, ignorant of the late arrival. As her eye rested on the visitor, she coloured, uttered an exclamation of surprise, and would have retreated, but Florence advanced to conceal and relieve her embarrassment, whilst Lord Dunrayne greeted her with some interest as Miss Cleveland, apologising for having startled her. She received his apology with a slight bow, answering his greeting with a timid courtesy and a downcast look.

"She is very shy, considering that I have known her for some time," thought his lordship then; but he remembered the startled glance, so hurriedly withdrawn—Florence's advance—Gor-

don's manner—some of his sister's observations on her conduct at Paris, though founded on a mistaken opinion, and he thought differently afterwards ; conjecturing that there was more than shyness in her sudden shrinking back, and that Gordon and Florence knew more than they chose to say. He remembered also a very sentimental flirtation with which he had beguiled not a few hours during his stay at Paris.

If Louisa Cleveland were not Florence Lyle, at least she listened to her praises with patience and sympathy, till his lordship wearied of the subject himself. Then, lest he should be *de trop* to the lovers, or in pity to her loneliness, he thought himself compelled to bestow much of his company on the baronet's sister, whose gentle sweetness was such a rebuke to his impetuosity, that he began seriously to check it, that he might not alarm her.

We hope none of my readers will be disappointed, but we have positively made up our mind not to give a particular account of the

wedding. If we furnished a programme of the ceremony, we should only be supplying weapons to be used against ourselves by ill-natured critics or good-natured friends. Who ever yet was entirely satisfied with another's arrangements in such an affair? The settlements were too large or too small: the bridegroom wore an old hat; or did not hand the bride as he should have done; or walked before, or walked behind, just when he should have done the contrary; or looked too merry, or looked too sad. The bride was too dismal, or too light-hearted: or she wore satin, when she should have worn silk; a bonnet, when it should have been a veil: she clung too firmly to her father's arm; was too awkward, or too self-possessed. The bridesmaids tittered, or huddled foolishly round the bride. Then some like the breakfast all in one room, whilst others think two indispensable: one would have the happy couple depart from the church-door, another would have them return to the house. In brief, arrange the matter how

we might, some one would cavil : so, to save ourselves from blame or ridicule, for the arrangement was left to us as friends of all—weak minds naturally shrink from censure—we beg to assure our readers that the ceremony was in every respect, plan and execution, perfect, leaving each to imagine it as each would most approve. If a malignant should hint a doubt of this, we defy him. Malice and slander never win belief! The world only credits good, and turns away in disgust from an evil tongue !

We shall furnish one or two data—foundation-stones, as it were, on which our readers may build their superstructures. The day was all shine—the marriages performed in the chapel at Aggenthorpe Castle. Mrs. Elton came up from Weymouth to attend them ; and Lord Dunrayne almost forgot to look at Florence, so much was he occupied in watching Miss Cleveland. We can in honour record no more particulars ; all the rest must be imagined. The wedding tour included a visit to Weymouth ;

and Florence stood on the Pebble Beach, looking out on the watery plain beyond, watching the advancing tide, rising, then falling and breaking at its base, the white foam dancing up to her shrinking feet. She saw it in some of its gentler beauty, not in its terrific grandeur ; yet when she beheld the crested wave rise high above her head, and listened to its sullen roar as it broke, and heard Robert tell in his plain, strong language, how bravely Gordon had fought with the pitiless sea for its helpless victim, it is said that she sank on her husband's shoulder with a sudden burst of tears.

That Mr. Lyle regretted losing Atherton, he never denied ; but he struggled against discontent, admitting it might be better for him that he should have a less splendid home. Mr. Ashton insisted on giving up Ryeburns, which he purchased, to the young couple, retiring to a smaller residence near. Florence had always preferred it to Atherton, as the home of her childhood, where she had been blessed with a

mother's love, and where she had first known Gordon ; and Gordon professed the same feelings for a reason resembling the last. Mr. Lyle, aware that the young and the old rarely accorded, would have sought a house in the neighbourhood : but his children would not hear of a separation—they would be the exception to the general rule ; and their entreaties, urged with glistening eyes and earnest tones, prevailed.

The house of Lyle and Gordon,—for Walton, after due—some thought undue, consideration, humbly declined becoming a partner,—stands high in repute for talent, honour, judgment, and credit ; but the shock to its prosperity was too great to be completely recovered for years,—its wealth and connexions are increasing, but it can scarcely be again the first mercantile establishment in Fairport, save in the estimation of the worthy clerk : yet this fact distresses neither partner. Mr. Lyle has felt how immense wealth and positive pre-eminence may lead to ostentation and a forgetful-

ness of Him who permitted or ordained its acquisition, thus converting a blessing into a curse. His gorgeous tastes have given way to the more simple ones of his child :—he considers the lot assigned him as that best for him ; and whilst active in business, thus using the means, feels, — and is happy in the feeling,—that the end is not in his hands. Nor does he forget, that though a superabundance of wealth may increase the temptation to pride and self-gratification, yet every station has its perils ; —and that a man worth only hundreds may cherish the same spirit of pride and display as the man worth thousands, though its development may be less striking from narrower circumstances.

No cloud has yet shadowed the open confidence of the father and his child ; no doubt, no separate interest, has chilled the warmth of their affection. Florence playfully accuses her father of allowing Gordon to rival her in his affections ; but he as playfully retorts that they are rivals in their devotion to her ; whilst Gor-

don declares that father and daughter do their utmost to spoil him, but that he is not to be corrupted.

Our weaknesses will still cling around us. The merchant did once propose Gordon's suing for a title in abeyance in his family; but the arch smile of Florence, and the quiet answer of Walter that he would claim it when he had done deeds worthy of it, set the idea at rest.

The mutual regard of the brothers appears to increase with longer association. They are rarely long apart, as though desirous that the affectionate intercourse of their later years should compensate for the estrangement of their youth: indeed Mr. Ashton is more at Ryeburns than at his own abode; ever welcomed warmly—ever parted from with regret.

The bridal parties had not long returned from their tours before Dunrayne called on them to assist at another wedding. Lord Aggenthorpe would have preferred Miss Cleve-

land's being the daughter of an earl, instead of only a baronet ; but as her fortune was large —larger by her brother's liberality, Dunrayne much attached, not a little wayward, and Louisa herself everything that he could desire, he received her as a daughter with all possible cordiality. Moreover, the earl is a humbler man. Much of his pride lingers still, but there are hopes that it is gradually wearing away. Mr. Lyle's difficulties impressed him forcibly with the instability of wealth ; whilst the fortitude and resignation with which the merchant bore the threatened misfortune made him look into the depths of his own heart. Of course his countess followed in his wake.

Dunrayne and his gentle wife reside in the neighbourhood. He retains all his deference for Florence ; but his jealous affection has subsided into a brother's regard, and does not exceed that of his wife, who loves her as a friend—looks up to her as an adviser. Gordon shares in the regard rendered his wife ; and it is hoped

that under the influence of his bride and his friends, Dunrayne will cease to become a source of anxiety to those interested in his happiness. His wife says this is already accomplished.

Sir Charles and his Emma are frequent visitors at Ryeburns and Aggenthorpe, and at present show no symptoms of discontent : nor is their friendship for Gordon and Florence on the decline—they assert it to be on the increase.

Mr. Walton is invaluable to his friends in pointing out every possible difficulty in all their plans, and still shakes his head, and looks alarmed when Florence's forgery is named ; nor does he ever discount a bill till after a most scrupulous and wearisome examination. The honour of the house is his pride and boast, and Gordon his model of perfection, from having by his energy so much contributed to its preservation.

A little Miss Florence is dividing his regard with his former favourite ; and, having once

taken her in his arms, after ascertaining by a long cross-examination of the nurse that her head would not roll off her shoulders from his awkward nursing, and the little thing having smiled upon him, it is asserted that he has left her his heiress, aware that her elder brother would be well provided for. We do not positively declare this to be fact—it is so difficult to decide in these days of reports what are facts and what are not ; but as the rumour has been traced to the lawyer, who says he made the will, it may chance to be correct, though so decided a step appears rather at variance with Walton's character. Florence says she is every day expecting a petition from the prudent clerk that her child may not be taught to write, lest it should commit its mother's sin.

In becoming a merchant, Gordon did not sink into the mere maker of money. Though surrounded by different ties, called to different duties from those which he had formerly anticipated, his desire to increase the knowledge—we do

not mean mere reading and writing—the virtue, and the consequent happiness of himself and others, was neither damped nor forgotten. He never agreed with those who, because evils and crimes have existed from the commencement of time, appear to consider that they have thus acquired a right of possession which it would be a bold, almost a sacrilegious act to dispute. In this case he would admit of no law of limitation; on the contrary, he held that most ills, moral, mental, or bodily, may be alleviated, prevented, or removed; and, undismayed by some failures, not having reckoned on universal success, he pursued his benevolent plans, unchecked by blame or ridicule, and in many instances received a present reward for his noble endeavours. One ill amended — one wrong righted—one sigh of suffering hushed—one step led into the right path—one heart soothed, awakened, purified—was encouragement enough;—and the prayers, the blessings, the happy faces, which he sometimes hears and

looks on, are proofs of his success. He was not the Utopian dreamer some asserted—he knew that perfection was not for earth ; but this was no reason why crime should be countenanced, or at least uncondemned, and no amendment attempted. Man cannot reach perfection here ; but if he strive not to walk with his God in this life, how shall he be fitted to stand in his presence—to love, to admire his infinite beauty, and glory, and power, in the next ?

Nor does Gordon stand alone, with none to sympathise and none to aid him in his hopes and his exertions. Never was there a more perfect communion between two minds than between Walter and his Florence. Slight differences in opinions and thoughts there are occasionally,—it could not, it should not be otherwise—there would be monotony in their conversation without it ; but in material points their thoughts, their hopes, are one and the same. Their confiding affection is a home of refuge—a flowery couch on which to rest, a

spell to counteract all evil. We will not say that Walter and Florence lived happy ever after, as they say in fairy tales, and as youth in its simplicity thinks possible; but we will assert, that the elements of happiness are within them. Troubles have come now and then—they are the lot of man; but as they place their trust on Him who can support, and as they neither suffer doubly by the anticipation of evils that may never arrive, nor by fretful irritation under those that really come, but disarm sorrow of half its pangs by cheerful submission, their lot may be envied by most. To be sure, as they have not been married many years, they may hereafter quarrel, “like ither folk;” but at present we do not anticipate such a conclusion. Not because Walter Gordon and Florence Lyle are by nature perfect—ever unruffled by disappointment, unirritated by opposition; but because their self-control is based on the only efficient principle, and because each, valuing the love and the

happiness of the other above all else earthly, shrinks with a timid trembling from the impatient word or the dark frown that may corrode or sever one link of affection's chain, or rob love of its beautiful bloom by too rude a touch.

How gentle, how watchful is true affection ! daring yet submissive ! sensitive yet confiding ! unshaken in trust, unchilled by doubt ! It is almost too bright, too beautiful to be a reality —too lovely for earth !

Mr. Sibthorp was the possessor of Atherton ! the first merchant in Fairport ! Who might not envy his lot—who would not change conditions ! He had attained the two grand objects of his ambition—where might a happier man be found ? Was Mr. Sibthorp happy ? Hear him grumbling at having been taken in to give so much, though not above boasting that thousands are as nothing to him. Mr. Hulton said he was only fit to bargain for tallow and blubber. Mark the inflated tone

—the wandering glance,—eye and ear greedy of praise. Is that man happy whose happiness depends on the flattery or the envy of his fellow men?

He would give a splendid house-warming to display his wealth—to excite envy at his possessions. The day arrived, and he welcomed his guests with a disgusting pomposity mingled with a mean seeking for applause. The turtle and venison were exquisite; the most ultra gourmet must have been contented with their flavour and their serving. The master of the feast sank back in his chair exulting in the splendour which environed him; his vanity gorged with the display, as his appetite was with the dainties. “ Could any look on him and not wish to be the like?”—was his thought: “ the present was glorious enough for him; what greater delight could the vista of the future present to his view?”

“ A toast, ladies and gentlemen!”

The glasses were filled;—the host rose—his

cold stony grey eyes gleamed with a flickering and unholy light, and his harsh voice acquired a peculiar shrillness that startled his hearers, as he shouted rather than said, “Wealth is power ! Gold the first good !”

Before any could drink the toast, the brimming glass had fallen from the uplifted hand ; the triumphant reveller, whose wealth was his god, had again sunk back in his chair, cold and motionless, with bloated cheeks and glassy eyes. What were now to him the delights of sight and sense and hearing ? He was senseless alike to all ;—this world to him a blank ; the next ?—what time would show.

The guests departed ; the physicians came ; the house of revelry was converted into the house of mourning. Mr. Sibthorp lived, I should say breathed—existed to die hourly, to suffer an unending death. His form was paralysed—his intellect restored to exactly that extent which made his torture the more exquisite ; a clear knowledge of his own defi-

ciency,—the power of suspecting, but not of controlling,—at times understanding others clearly, yet aware that no other comprehended him. He had sympathised with none in their sufferings—none sympathised with him. The wealth which had been his idol faded before his still longing eyes. His wife shrunk from his irritability, whose imperfect expression was dreadful, and shunned his presence, leaving him to the careless care of hirelings. His daughter ran away with a penniless clerk of worse than doubtful character. A chancery suit deprived him of half his idolised riches; his son, indulging in every low and debasing vice, squandered the other, forged, and fled the country. And the perceptions of the paralytic became sufficiently distinct to understand, to feel all this; and his eyes saw his name in the papers as a bankrupt! Ten days after, his earthly suffering ceased!—his tongue had lost the power to explain his thoughts—it is not for man to decide what those thoughts had been.

Atherton was again for sale.

“By practising a little economy, Florence, we might re-purchase it,” said her father.

“We are all so happy at Ryeburns, my dear father——”

“Enough, my child!”

The generous Hulton became its purchaser; and the merchant and his child no longer gazed on its pictures—no longer trod its paths, or thought of its beauties, with regret: it was more endeared to them by being the property of its present possessors. Julia Desmond was prevented attending the wedding of her friend by the dangerous illness of her aunt, who died shortly after, leaving her the whole of her property, which was considerable. Some months had elapsed since her marriage, and Florence Gordon was sitting opposite her friend in the latter’s home, watching with a gentle sympathy Julia’s trembling fingers as she traced unsteady characters on the paper before her.

“It is done! look over and send it—I dare

not read it myself," said Julia, handing the letter to Florence, without looking up, and burying her face in the cushion of the sofa on which she was sitting.

Florence took it in silence, read, corrected a word, and folded it. Half-smothered sobs, increasing in strength, came from the bosom of the writer. Florence looked anxiously at her friend—then hesitated,—balanced the letter in her hand—rose, and approaching Julia, bent kindly over her.

"Julia, my dear Julia ! I had hoped——"

"I have done all you advised ; leave me now !" said the agitated girl without looking up.

Florence's tears fell on the bowed neck of her friend ; but she feared to speak her sympathy, lest it should seem like a reproach. Suddenly the sufferer's head was raised — the finger extended to hush other sounds — the eyes closed, and every other sense absorbed in hearing.

"He comes ! it is he ! Florence, save me !

spare me! If I see him, I am his—I cannot resist his entreaties!" and again her head sank on the sofa.

The faint trampling of a still distant horse was all that Florence heard: a woman's, a loving woman's heart alone could have distinguished the coming of its lord—known who was the rider. Florence knelt before her, took both her hands in hers, and looking into her pale face, spoke impressively.

"Julia, this is no time for deception: understand yourself—be candid with me. I have shown you Clanellon in his true light—your future course rests with yourself. If my words have not convinced you, yield not to them:—what the weakness of love grants to persuasion, it will also repent. Take back the letter, the point is between you and your God. If you can vow at the altar to love and honour Clanellon—to submit to his guidance, knowing what you now know, none have a right to require you to give him up. If you cannot

take this vow—if you dare not trust his guidance, yet feel that he will guide—if you resolve to banish one unworthy of your love, do so from higher motives than pique or a friend's persuasions, and trust not to your own weak heart. To make a sacrifice, and repent it through life, wearing that life away in sad repinings, is to sow sorrow and reap misery. If you can ask a blessing on such a union, let it be ! It is for you alone to decide :— I act as you desire !”

As she ceased speaking, she released the hands she had held, and extended the letter. Julia seized it eagerly without raising her eyes, and made an attempt to tear it ; but her very hurry defeated her wishes ; the trembling fingers had not the power to fulfil them, and the letter remained entire. Florence rose with a sigh. She did not speak ; but Julia knew her thoughts. The letter fell at her feet, and she grasped Florence's dress.

“ Pity my weakness ! Do not despise me !

Take it ! there it is ! give it to him — say all that is kind ; but do not let him come, — I dare not see him !”

The low voice, broken by sobs, ceased, and the weeping girl hid her face in her hands.

Florence again knelt beside her, and threw her arms around her.

“ Julia, dearest Julia, is this your own deliberate resolve ?

“ Yes, yes—it should be so ; but go, lest he come, and my weakness yield.”

“ Heaven bless you, dearest, and give you strength !” said her friend earnestly, kissing her cold damp brow, before she departed.

She had scarcely left the room, before she heard Julia spring to the door and double-lock it on the inside.

“ Show Lord Clanellon into the drawing-room !” was Florence’s order.

Poor Florence was at that moment little less pale and agitated than her friend. She blamed herself as the cause, though the inno-

cent one, of Julia's suffering, whose love she was convinced had been first won to awaken her jealousy and pique her into greater warmth.

The idea of meeting Clanellon was almost alarming. They had not met since her refusal to fulfil the conditional engagement, and he would know at once that to her he owed Julia's rejection. She had writhed once before beneath his impertinence—now he would have no motive to restrain his violence;—nay, to such a mind as his, it would be a gratification to overwhelm her with his insolence. She would have avoided the meeting; but it could not be: Julia would send the letter by no other, and, for her sake, it must be endured. Before the servant opened the door to admit the dreaded visitor, she had resumed outward composure.

Clanellon started back on seeing who was before him. He had parted from her as his plighted bride—he had not seen her since she had become the bride of another. The blood

rushed unbidden to his cheek and brow, and then retreated, leaving the livid paleness of subdued passion—a passion ready to burst all bounds with a frightful vehemence on the slightest withdrawal of restraint.

Florence showed neither timidity nor excessive fear, nor the imperturbable calmness of former days. The former she dared not show ; the latter was beyond her power. She too was pale ; but she met her visitor's scrutiny without change or apparent shrinking—with the calm firmness of a lofty yet gentle nature.

He was involuntarily awed by the calm dignity of virtue ; but the impression did not last, and the curled lip and contracted brow betrayed a fixed resolve to wound.

He advanced to Florence, who rose at his entrance, with a bow so ceremonious as to be an insult.

“ I had not anticipated this pleasure. Health and high fortune to the daughter of Fairport’s most conscientious, and prudent, and wealthy

merchant ! Unshadowed prosperity to Walter Gordon's wife, and her whole race!"

His teeth gnashed as he concluded, and his words fell on the heart like a mocking prophecy—the heralds of an evil doom.

Florence trembled, and shrunk from his gaze, that wandered over face and figure ; but recovering herself, replied with a calmness which increased his irritation.

"I thank you for your good wishes, Lord Clanellon, and return them in sincerity. Neither could have desired this meeting ; but for the sake of one whom I love much, I consented to endure it. This will explain," giving him Julia's letter.

He opened it, read the first line, and looked at the bearer. There could be no hope of concealing anything from that keen glance ; the heart's desire—the soul's secret must be bared before it. His white teeth pressed on his lower lip lest words should issue forth :—he feared to trust himself to speak, and, with an ironical

bow of thanks, turned to a window and concluded the perusal. His back was towards her, and Florence had no means of anticipating his future demeanour. After a while, he turned and fronted Florence, with the open letter in his hand.

“ You know the contents of this ?” he said in the deep tones of hardly restrained passion, mingled with irony.

“ I do !” replied Florence firmly.

“ Perhaps you dictated them ? There are sentences worthy even of your talents :—Miss Desmond’s eloquence is of the heart !”

“ Lord Clanellon’s penetration is rarely to be disputed ; but if he look again, he will recognise Miss Desmond’s hand.”

“ Her hand I do ; but not her mind. The characters are irregular : the heart hesitated, and the hand shook.”

“ The hand did shake, Lord Clanellon, and the heart mourned. Can woman’s heart do otherwise, when she takes a last farewell of him whom she once loved ?”

“Once loved, Mrs. Gordon?”

“Once loved, Lord Clanellon! Miss Desmond's is the decision of judgment, not of persuasion.”

A sarcastic smile spoke his incredulity.

“I would see Miss Desmond.”

“You cannot. It is her particular request, as you have read, that you will not seek an interview.”

“This request is strange, since hers is the decision of judgment, not of persuasion. Why should she fear it? It will be but a proud display of strength.”

“Julia is not one to feel pride in what pains another; and she has no wish to conceal from you that the decision has cost her much,—that a meeting, without changing her resolution, would increase her sorrow.”

“You are certain that a meeting would not change her resolution!”

“Has she not said so in her letter?”

His incredulous smile was still more sarcastic than before.

“ Suppose I persist in my demand to see Miss Desmond,—what shall hinder me?”

“ Your own honour. You would not aggravate the suffering you have caused.”

“ I thank you, madam, for your high opinion;” and again he bowed ironically. “ Do you think to deceive me? The weak bend to the strong: they have done so before—they will do so again.”

Florence was annoyed: he spoke triumphantly, not as if merely uttering an aphorism.

“ Is it not so?” he demanded, folding his arms, and again bending on her his insolent scrutiny.

“ If the weak trust to their own strength, Lord Clanellon, they will fail: but there is One who can make strong the feeble, and bring the designs of the wicked to nought!”

“ Proceed, Mrs. Gordon! I am an admirer of the sublime.”

Florence's pale cheek flushed at his impertinence. “ Pardon me, my lord. As this in-

terview can be pleasing to neither, let it terminate. I am charged from Miss Desmond with all good wishes ; allow me to add my own."

" In plain terms, you fear, and would fain be rid of me. Can a woman, a loving woman, make no allowance for the feelings of a rejected suitor—one who loved, passionately loved ?"—laying a firm grasp on her arm as he spoke, and looking into her calm and beautiful eyes.

She drew haughtily back with a crimson flush.

" I would allow much for one who has lost Julia Desmond's love, if he prized it as he should."

" Mrs. Gordon's penetration is rarely at a fault :—she does not tremble at a trifle."

She did tremble, and turn away at his look and tone.

He was silent for some moments, then spoke abruptly.

" Tell Julia I go at her bidding: say that the heart which she rejects is too much crushed

to rebel ; that overwhelmed by the shock, it finds no words to tell its anguish. I forgive—I bless her, and depart in sorrow, not in anger."

Florence looked up in surprise at this sudden softening of his tone. He read her suspicion in her wonder, and the curb to his fury was removed. So fierce, so intense was the rage depicted on his features, that Florence stepped back in alarm and placed her hand on the bell-rope.

" You fear !" he exclaimed between triumph and sarcasm. " Florence Gordon has learned to fear Lord Clanellon, to tremble at his look !"

His fierceness softened a little, and she withdrew her hand.

He seized and held it with an iron grasp ; revelling, as it seemed, in the fear he had created.

" Release my hand, my lord, or I call assistance," she said, struggling for firmness.

" What does Mrs. Gordon fear ? I wear no

arms. I would but press the hand that was plighted to me; I would but wish you every happiness and then depart."

She made no reply; but her calm dignity and rebuking look were not without their power in shortening the interview, if not in laying the evil spirit.

"I thank you, madam, for all your favours shown—for all your acts, as Florence Lyle, as Florence Gordon. May my heart's wishes be fulfilled on you and on your husband! Again farewell! I do not ask you to remember me; I am not one to be forgotten!" So saying, with a look that must long be remembered, and a vice-like grasp of the hand he held, he left the room.

It was not till she heard the hollow sound of his horse's galloping across the lawn that Florence breathed freely; and when Julia's maid entered the room with a message from her mistress, she was shocked by her deathly look.

Julia insisted on knowing all—all even to the very minutest detail. Did her heart hope to find an excuse in that detail for loving still? Some regret, that might seem like penitence? Alas for her woman's love, there was none such to hear!

In prudence and in justice, Florence did tell all—not in anger, but in truth and sorrow.

Poor Julia! she did not let her friend see her indignation. When compelled to think ill of those we prize, we like not that others should perceive it. She spoke only on hearing the message to herself; and then merely said, “Poor Clanellon!”

Florence made no remark. Julia hid her face; but her sobs were audible, though she tried to check them.

The carriage drove to the door.

“Julia, dear Julia! will you not return with me? If so, I will wait some hours,” said Florence earnestly.

“ No, no : leave me !”

“ Will you follow to-morrow, Julia ? You know I cannot linger here. My father is ill, and nothing but my love for you could have induced me to leave him.”

“ I know it, and would not have you linger. Forgive me, dear Florence, for having asked you to meet him. Go, with my thanks—my fondest love—I would be alone ! I shall sooner learn to think as you wish :—I shrink in shame from the eye that looks upon me now.”

Florence feared to leave Julia alone : she distrusted her fortitude if Clanellon came not —her resolution if he did — she distrusted him too ; but her persuasions were of no avail, and with a warm embrace they parted,—one to watch by a fond father’s couch, the other to weep a lover’s perfidy.

Florence had not proceeded many miles on her road home, when, just as she was ascending a steep hill, a horseman advanced from be-

hind a thicket standing a little way from the road, where she doubted not that he had been waiting her approach, and rode up to the carriage-window. It was Clanellon ! The carriage stopped obedient to his order.

He looked at Florence for some moments in insolent enjoyment of her annoyance before he spoke ; but when he did address her, had the servants overheard his words, they could not possibly have imagined him actuated by any evil feeling. His tone was gentle — his words courteous : it was his look alone, or his over-courteous speech, which revealed his triumphant malice.

“ I could not resist the pleasure of taking another farewell, and repeating my thanks and good wishes. Believe me, you shall not be forgotten, but shall be duly provided with Lord and Lady Clanellon’s cake. I only regret that Mr. Lyle’s illness will deprive us of the pleasure of your presence at our wedding ; and I see you regret the deprivation as much as

myself. Good morning ! My kind regards to Mr. Gordon. I will tell Julia I have seen you thus far on your journey."

He turned from the window with a kiss of his hand as he concluded ; and before Florence had recovered from her indignant surprise, he had struck his spurs into his horse's sides, and dashing down a bye-lane, was beyond the reach of her voice.

" Whither does that lane lead ?"

" It is a short cut for a horse to Miss Desmond's, ma'am," replied the servant.

Florence hesitated a moment, and then gave orders to drive on.

To return would be useless. Clanellon must have lost or won his suit before she could re-join Julia ; and if her resolution gave way after all she had heard, further interference would be vain and unwelcome. No one had a right to control her—her fate was in her own hands.

Mrs. Gordon was not forgotten. Within three weeks arrived the cake, with Lord and

Lady Clanellon's kind love, directed in his lordship's own hand, with the insolent and unusual addition of an elegant present in their joint names.

About three years after this meeting, an invalid was turning in restless anxiety on an unsmoothed pillow in one of the first hotels in Paris, listening with feverish eagerness to every approaching step, and becoming more restless at each fresh disappointment as the steps passed his door and he saw not those whom he wished to see. Other steps succeeded. The sick man raised his head, listened more eagerly, and a faint glow came on his pallid cheek. The steps ceased at his door ; then came a low whispering — not so low but that he could distinguish gentle tones whose sweet music could yet soothe or agitate. The door opened softly, and a lady entered leaning on the arm of a gentleman, and approached the bed with noiseless steps.

“ You are come ! I knew you would, though

I feared that you might come too late. Heaven bless you both!" and the sick man fell back on his pillow with a hand of each of his visitors grasped in his.

The sick man was Viscount Clanellon—or, more properly speaking, the Earl of Brackenbury, his father having died some months before; but we shall still call him Clanellon, as by that name he has been hitherto known. His visitors were Florence and Walter Gordon.

The hand of death was on him, and he knew it. Julia—the gentle, the loving Julia, had died self-convicted and broken-hearted, soon after the birth of her child. She learnt from Clanellon's own lips, as well as from his manner, that he had never loved her: all that she had heard against him was confirmed, and yet she pined to her latest hour for that love which he could not give—those marks of an affection which he no longer deigned to counterfeit! Her tears and gentle reproaches were in vain; yet still she loved him—would have died for him, —did die, under his coldness and neglect!

The remembrance of her wrongs pressed hardly on the dying man. What would he not have given to have restored her to life, if only to deplore his harshness, and hear her say “Dear Clanellon, I forgive you!” It was only whilst caressing his child that the vision of the mother’s pale, sad face ceased to torture him.

“I knew you would come,” repeated the dying man to Florence and her husband, when sufficiently recovered to converse. “I did not doubt that, though I feared you might come too late; and I do not doubt your forgiveness, though I dare not ask it. I offer no excuse for the past—I have none to offer: you cannot think me more sinful than I think myself. I do not plead my love to you, Florence, as an apology for my violence,—I do not name it now to win your pity; but I did love you truly and devotedly,—more, I reverenced you, though even that could not always curb my fury. Had I not believed you both too noble to remember wrongs, I had not

dared to ask your presence. You have come at the summons of a dying and a sinful man, and you will soothe his last moments by promising to be as parents to his boy—his only child. It was Julia's wish, though she scarcely dared to name it. Do not hate me because I broke her heart ; or, at least, hate not my boy for his father's crimes. To you alone can I confide him with perfect confidence : you will cherish and love him for his mother's sake, —will you not ?" asked the sufferer, turning an anxious gaze from one to the other.

" We will !" replied Walter and Florence solemnly. " He shall be as our own child."

The anxious father pressed the hands of the speakers to his lips.

" The prayers of a dying parent bless you ! if the prayers of one so sinful can bring a blessing. You will not teach him to hate his father ; but, oh ! let him not resemble him ! —make him like yourselves. I have but one thing more to ask—do not deny it. Should

my boy hereafter love your daughter and she return his love, you will not reject his suit because his father sinned?"

"Not on that account," said Gordon, half smiling at the forethought, yet unwilling to distress the sufferer; "but ——"

"But what?" asked the sick man impatiently.

"It will be better that your son should choose a wife in his own rank; and, as my ward, I should particularly wish him to do so. My daughter may have but a small fortune, and unequal marriages are rarely happy. He will, I trust, make a wiser choice."

"That he cannot do: I would rather have him the husband of your daughter than of the first lady in the land. You must grant me this—you must not deny me. I only ask it if he should prove worthy—if both should desire it. I have named it in my will as my particular wish. Do not say no! Plead for me with your husband, Florence."

"It shall not need," said Gordon much affected ; "I will not object under the circumstances you suppose, though my advice will always tend to another choice."

"It will be in vain !" said the dying man, his eye lighting up with a sudden brilliancy. "My boy will love your child as truly as I loved her mother, but more generously : I feel—I know it !"

Clanellon lingered but a few hours, and passed from life with the hands of the Gordons clasped in his, and his eyes turned on Florence, who was holding his sleeping boy in her arms.

We guess we have now given an account of all worthy of exciting interest.

Heigho ! It is to be hoped no more of our friends will tease us to write their adventures ; it is a very tiresome task, and they may not be satisfied after all : some people never are contented !

Are our readers delighted to have arrived at the conclusion of this veracious history ?

Allow us to assure them that our delight exceeds theirs a thousand-fold. Should they have wearied of our tale, which we should much regret, we beg to remark, that history is often dull and prosy ; but then it is very instructive, and “ Knowledge is Power.”

“ To each—to all, a fair good night !
And pleasing dreams, and slumbers light !”

THE END.

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